BARGAIN WITH THE DEAD - - - *A Deed of Doom* - - - by SEABURY QUINN

MARCH

Weird Tales

15¢

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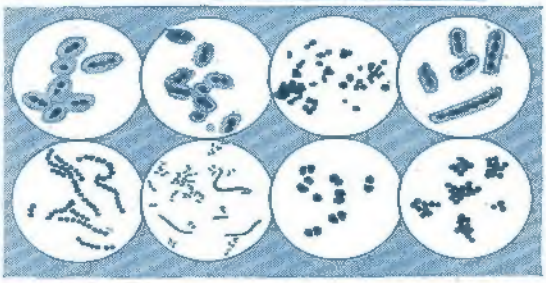

TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus Viridans, Friedlander's Bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus Hemolyticus, Bacillus Influenzae, Micrococcus Catarrhalis, Staphylococcus Aureus.

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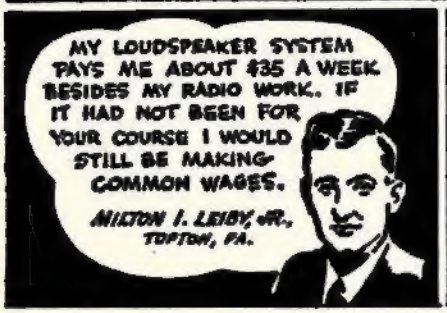

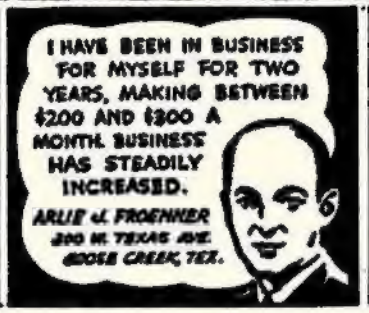

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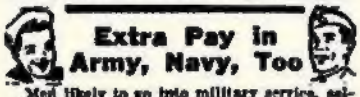

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Weird Tales

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MARCH, 1943 Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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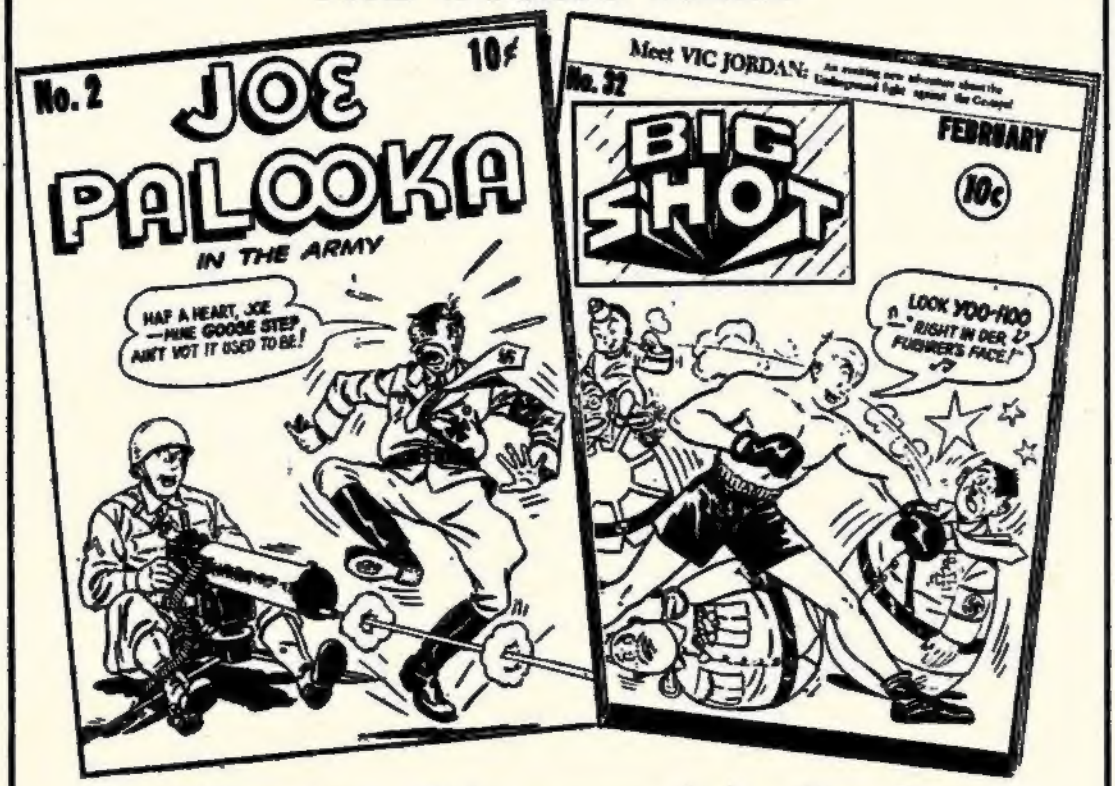

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Flight Into Destiny

By ***VERNE CHUTE***

They said the strange malady could come only from the Brazilian jungle— and how can a man catch jungle fever on the fifteenth floor of a New York office building?

THE blond young giant, Eric Jensen, was more than a clerk in the firm of Westbrook & Company, Exporters; Wayne Westbrook had seen to that. Of course the big jovial Westbrook would have insisted Eric's rise in position had nothing to do with Eric's having received a legacy of fifty thousand dollars from an estate a year before, nor would he have admitted that, with the able help of his niece, he was trying to divert Eric's fortune into the company, without relinquishing any of the company's control.

If Eric was aware of all this he gave no indication. It was as if he was already reconciled to the idea of spending the rest of his life at his desk.

It was late enough in the afternoon for Wayne Westbrook to have caught the 4:45 to City Manors, the reports of the day to be filed, the evening mail sent on its fifteen floor journey down the mail chute. And it was late enough for Ann Allen to be irritated at being called by Eric Jensen to take dictation.

Yet there was nothing unusual in the procedure of Eric's clicking one of the small pearl switches on the dictograph at his desk. Nor in his mumbled words through the box to Ann. In Eric's ten years

with Westbrook & Company, this day was to end no differently than any other, apparently.

Yet this day was to be different. In the space of a half hour's time everything was to be changed. Destiny was ready to step in.

"All right, I'm coming," Ann said, looking at the clock. A hard little smile spoiled her nice mouth.

When she got up from her desk she shot a baleful glance through the glass door of the bookkeeping department. But her mumbled words were not for Old Mosby, who was busy putting the company's books to bed, her words were for Eric.

"If he mentions that Ingrid again—" she cried. Her words were subtle threat.

Going noiselessly through the door into Eric Jensen's office, Ann stopped, stared.

Usually Eric would be hunched stoop-shouldered over his desk, half-turned away from the window as if he were bracing himself against the freedom that lay outside.

SHE saw a different Eric now. Lean face flushed, nostrils dilating with each deep breath he took. His eyes burned straight ahead, as blue as the deepest blue on the canvas painting on the wall at which he stared.

It was not the first time Ann had come in to see Eric staring at the picture. The picture seemed to bolster him, seemed to give him a vicarious thrill of freedom by the mere looking at it. But his gaze was far different now. At that moment, with the dying sun streaming against his flushed face, with his sea-blue eyes and light hair, Eric himself might have posed for that picture, had he winged headgear and stubby beard.

The picture was a seascape, with a blond-haired Viking standing boldly in the prow of the longship gazing ahead; a roving pirate staring into the unknown.

Eric, like thousands of others before him, had been tricked by fate into the wrong kind of job—an inside job. The city cramped him, crushed him. Perhaps the picture on his wall wasn't good for Eric, perhaps it was the sight of his distant ancestors instilled in him the desire to throw off the yoke of salaried servitude and be free. Once he had been free—like when he won his football letter at Minnesota; or like a few years ago when, with his own plane he chased the clouds through the sky, matching his skill with the winds.

Ann slipped into the red-leather chair near Eric's desk and waited. It is a known fact that no young lady likes to be ignored, especially one who happens to be the boss' niece. She rapped impatiently with her pencil. "Yes, Eric," she said.

Eric swung around, startled. He nearly dropped the small bronze paper weight he had picked up from the desk, a replica of a Norseman's battle-axe. His voice was husky, a hurried whisper:

"Take a letter, please, quickly—"

Ann looked puzzled. Her notebook automatically balanced itself on her knee. "To whom, Eric?"

"Why, to Lars Thorsen—" Eric stopped before he had added an "of course." He shook a cigarette out of a brown package, put it into his mouth but did not light it.

Ann repeated the name as she wrote it down in longhand in her notebook: *"Lars Thorsen. Lars Thorsen*—where shall I send it, Eric?"

Eric's eyes came away from the picture of the yellow-haired sea rover again. Small beads of moisture stood out on his puzzled brow. "Why, just send it—send it to Lars Thorsen—" His voice stumbled some more, came to a dead stop. Then he admitted: "I guess I don't know where to send it!"

"Oh."

Eric gave a short, embarrassed laugh. He looked at his desk clock, at the squared

corners of his glass-topped desk, at the water cooler in the corner—all were modern things. The cloudy, feverish look in his eyes disappeared. He said, "Let's get out of here—Ann. I'll drive you home."

THE girl's face paled. She rose to her feet, peered into Eric's face. "Don't you remember? We're driving out to Uncle's tonight for dinner—"

Eric's shoulders drooped again as if something inside him had collapsed. "Oh, yes, Mr. Westbrook asked us to come. At seven, isn't it?"

But Ann had another question, and another searching glance. "Mr. Eric Jensen, who is this—Ingrid?"

"Ingrid?" The name itself was enough to soften Eric's thin face. And it brought life to his blue eyes. He pushed back his chair, got to his feet, looking suddenly like a small boy who was being forced to disclose something he wished to keep secret. Finally he said: "You wouldn't know her. I don't know her myself—"

Mr. Westbrook's niece spoiled her nice mouth again. "It's very funny!"

Eric looked into the girl's angry face. But there was no trace of rebellion in his own; he gave Ann a half-hearted smile, then waded across the thick rug toward the clothes closet. When he heard the girl close the door behind her, he turned, spoke to the empty room: "Who is——Ingrid?"

He turned the name over on his lips. His glance went to the bookshelves in the corner as if searching for an answer to that name. On the shelves were books of Norse mythology, of Viking lore, Sagas of Norway from Harald the Fairhair to King Haakon VII. In the books were tales even of the Norsemen's experiences with the North American Indians, the *Skraelings*, centuries before Columbus was born.

Eric's inheritance had allowed him to indulge in his hobby of collecting. The far corner of the room was filled with Norse spears, shields. A huge iron battle-axe hung from the wall.

When Ann made an abrupt entrance, Eric was back at the closet getting out his coat. "I'm sorry," he said. "Perhaps I've been reading too much—let's get out of here before—something else—happens—"

"*Did* something happen?"

But Ann didn't press him for an answer, and as Eric didn't offer any further explanation, the subject was dropped.

THE evening went off well enough at Wayne Westbrook's home, with Ann's suspicious eyes always on Eric's face, and Wayne Westbrook watching them both. The big exporter was a widower of several years, but he had a houseful of servants to do his bidding.

Ann and her uncle did a lot of whispering together, but Eric seemed unaware that he was worrying them. The next morning found him at work as if nothing had happened.

At thirty-five, with ten years Westbrook Exporting Company under his belt, it even looked as if Eric was girding his belt for another ten years. When he first received his legacy, he had gone to Westbrook with his resignation and a happy plan for getting out of an office. But Eric found that he was already too late. The big man's hold on him was as secure as it was on everything else he touched. Westbrook put it nicely— The company couldn't get along without Eric Jensen; it has been found that Eric had great executive ability. Because of this executive ability, he was allowed to "invest" twenty thousand dollars in Westbrook's concern.

When Ann came into Eric's office that morning, Westbrook waited just outside the door. Yet Eric's strange condition seemed to have passed. He was on the job.

In fact it was Westbrook who was the first to show any irrationality that morning.

Just before noon he came tearing into Eric's office.

"Eric!" he cried sharply. Then he pulled up. A startled, odd look came to his wide brow. He stared. "Your face, man!"

Eric's face was mottled, looked like a basket of pink and white roses. The hand that he pushed back his yellow hair, shook. The same hand went on to gesture negatively, as if everything were all right.

"Man!" muttered Westbrook again. Ann came in, gave a faint cry. She quickly shut the door after her to cut off the gaze of the curious office workers.

WESTBROOK looked scared, but there was something he wanted to say, to clear up before he left the room. "I was just talking to Rankin of the Atlantic Forewarding Company. He said you told him on the phone 'to be patient, that if the natives rushed, to go to higher ground and wait!'—what does that mean, Eric?"

Eric's brightened eyes flared in a look of suspicion at the Norseman on the wall. Then he shook his head wearily, sunk his flushed face into his hands.

Wayne Westbrook said to Ann: "Call Doctor Chalmers! Quick!"

After Ann had run from the room, Eric got up from his chair and went to the window. He watched the teeming traffic of a cross street fifteen floors below for a moment then came back to the desk. "It's nothing," he told Westbrook. "It'll pass." He smiled a little strangely. "The only thing I've had to drink in the last twenty-four hours was two cocktails out at your place and a small beer with yesterday's coldplate."

Westbrook, who was about fifty-five, tried to get fatherly. "I know you've got a fever, bad. But, Eric, there's other things—" He patted Eric on the shoulder. "Come, come, you know we don't have any secrets—not you and I. What is it, Eric? You and Ann fall out over something? Another girl? The hot weather? A bad break on the market—or did one of your horses finally win at Saratoga?"

Eric looked furtively at the window again, his glance suddenly like that of a caged animal. "I feel hot," he said, adding firmly, "but I don't feel sick!"

Doctor Charles Chalmers didn't waste any time coming up from his office, two floors down. Yet in spite of present haste, he had the look of a man who had examined half of New York's tired business men who wanted him to prescribe a vacation in the Bahamas, or two weeks in Miami under the palms.

"There's nothing the matter with me," Eric told him. He looked at Westbrook. "Shall I take off my shirt?"

Doctor Chalmers gave them both a quick look. Then his gray eyes widened slightly at the strange color of Eric's face. "Keep your shirt on, Mr. Jensen."

HE FELT Eric's pulse, noted his fevered cheeks. Then he looked at Eric's tongue. That was all superficial examination, but the strange irregular splotches—"Hm-mm," he said.

From that small "hm-mm" Dr. Chalmers allowed himself one sudden curse of excitement. He caught Westbrook's arm. "Your man's got the fever all right. Jungle Fever!"

"Jungle Fever?" Westbrook looked at Eric and laughed nervously. "Impossible," he nearly shouted. "Eric's been right here all the time. Besides, this is an office building, not a swamp. This is the fifteenth floor of the Equitable Eastern Building, New York City."

Eric apparently felt well enough to look amused.

The doctor was dead serious. "New York City or the Amazon—it's Jungle Fever!"

Even Eric was impressed by the fervency of the doctor's reply. Chalmers went on:

"I guess I should know. I put in four hectic years with a rubber company in South America." He moved back, stared at Eric as if he were some new kind of specimen. "Say, how in hell can a man catch the Jungle Fever on the fifteenth floor of New York office building? That's one for Ripley."

In the crisp silence that followed, the doctor still had the floor. He dived into his bag, then came up shaking his head and looking at Eric again. "I'm afraid it'll take more than quinine for you, lad."

A smile forced its way through Eric's set lips. He shook his head savagely, pulled himself to his feet. He appeared to be suddenly trying to fight something off.

Color flowed and ebbed from his face, small beads of moisture came popping out on his brow. From lips, now white against his face, he cried:

"Hast thou a shot of mead?" His voice, strangely pitched, came again: "Thrall, a drinking horn! Mead!"

"Mead?" echoed three voices.

One of the voices, the doctor's, muttered, "Mead, the drink of the old Norsemen—" He caught Eric's arm, pulled him toward the couch.

Westbrook and Ann still stared openmouthed. But Chalmers was a doctor and couldn't let anything appear to surprise him. When Eric sank to the couch, Doctor Chalmers propped his head up, thrust a small thermometer under his tongue. He kept talking in a comforting professional tone.

"Nice bunch of trophies you have. Partial to Norse antiques, aren't you? I suppose you read a lot of Viking lore?" Doctor Chalmers turned from the seascape to the thermometer he took from Eric's mouth.

Eric was muttering again, his words coming as from another world. "Ingrid," he said. His face was so indescribably soft and tender, his eyes so wistful that it made the old doctor turn away.

THEN Eric's voice filled with alarm. "It is to thee, Lars Thorsen. Higher ground. Protect her till I come. Rally thy men, Lars Thorsen—" His words broke off. He stared at the three white faces around him, then caught the doctor's arm, seeming suddenly irritated. "Haste, man, danger is afoot!"

Eric raised himself from the edge of the couch, looked toward his trophies in the corner and slid unconsciously to the floor.

Ann screamed. Westbrook leaped forward, his cold cigar drooping from his mouth. He helped the doctor get Eric back on the couch.

"Nothing to be alarmed at," said Doctor Chalmers, more for Ann's benefit than Westbrook's. The big man turned to his niece. "Yes, Ann, we'll take care of things —you go ahead and watch the outer office."

When the girl closed the door behind her, Westbrook touched the doctor's arm. "Ann's excited, naturally—they're engaged, you know— Now, about this fever —is it contagious?"

The doctor looked up from bending over Eric. He snapped. "No, this kind of fever isn't contagious. And, Wayne Westbrook, if those two are engaged, I'll bet it's your doings. Do you think that a girl who's in love with a fellow would be in the next room now, watching the front office?"

Westbrook gave a snort and let it go. It was evident that the doctor was one, at least, who wasn't controlled by the big man's will.

The doctor bent over Eric who was breathing steadily now. When he straightened up again he took out a card and handed it to Westbrook. "Tell Miss Allen to call this number. We'll have to take Jensen to a hospital."

Westbrook objected to that. "You'll do no such thing," he said. "Take him to my place. And say, what kind of a fever did you say it was?" He clicked the switch on the dictograph, told Ann to come in.

Dr. Chalmers smiled and gave in. "Okay, your place," he said. His voice turned serious again. "Now, Wayne, we've never kidded each other—so let's not start now. At least, I won't kid you. Here's how it stands: Eric has got what's called Irrahuarro Fever."

Westbrook exchanged the sodden lump in his mouth for a fresh cigar. "Yes, go on—no, wait."

ANN came in, asked about Eric. Then she went out again to arrange for a car to take Eric out to Westbrook's.

The doctor came back from the washroom with a wet towel in his hands. He didn't seem to mind the interruption. "Eric Jensen has somehow contacted one of the strangest maladies in the Amazon country. Along the River Irrahuarro are a number of small swamps, and from these black vinetangled morasses comes the fever known only to that locality."

"But, my God, man, this isn't a swamp. It's New York City."

"That's what you said before!" Dr. Chalmers draped the towel over his patient's brow. "Now, this fever is paradoxical—no headaches, no heaviness of thoughts, sluggishness of body. Rather it's like a stimulant. A man's body feels light, he is ofttimes giddy in talk and action and at other times completely at the mercy of his subconscious mind. The victim dies unless he's removed from further exposure. This usually means getting the victim away from the swamp—" He smiled at Westbrook. "But—this is New York."

Westbrook had got his cigar lit by the time Eric came around and was sitting up. Eric looked tired, but otherwise seemed to show no ill effects of his faint. He dug a cigarette out of his pocket, glancing at the doctor. "Say, what happened to me?"

Dr. Chalmers reached down and pulled out a cigarette from Eric's pack. Westbrook's match lit the two.

"You've got some kind of fever here. You're going to have some rest and quiet, just take it easy until this fever wears itself off."

Westbrook stepped back into the conversation. "Yes, Eric, Dr. Chalmers thinks it would be a good idea if you come out to my house for a week or two. I'm sure everything will clear up by that time. Ann can go with you. Lots of room."

Eric seemed bewildered by all the attention. Ann came in with a suddenness that betold her standing behind the half-opened door. "I'm sure they know what is right—Can you walk all right, dear?"

Eric hesitated. The look he shot toward the open window, at the picture on the wall was appealing. Doctor Chalmers saw that look and smiled thinly at Ann and Westbrook. He let out his breath slowly and did not voice his thoughts.

Then Eric was on his way out of the room with Ann. She had a prescription and the doctor's orders.

Doctor Chalmers began putting his things back into his little black satchel. "I'll stop in at your place in a couple of hours to see Eric. Nothing I can do now. If it's that kind of fever it'll just have to burn itself out—that's the best way we found to get it over with. Right now, I want to have a talk with a specialist."

"That's fine," said Westbrook. He grinned in the direction Ann and Eric had gone.

Doctor Chalmers shut his bag with a bang. "Wayne," he said evenly, "that's an awful nice boy and I'd hate to see anything happen to him. He seems more like a prisoner behind bars than a co-worker."

Westbrook hid the hard look around his

eyes with a smile. His eyes said for Chalmers to tend to his own business, but his smile said: "You're an old-fashioned fogey. Eric can take care of his own business."

Two hours later Eric was.

Ann's wild voice came over the phone to Westbrook. "Eric's gone," the girl cried. "I was just out of the room for a few moments—"

DOCTOR CHALMERS had just come into Westbrook's office. He leaned closer, could hear Ann's wild voice: "We'd only been here a half-hour. He seemed all right, asked me to go to the store for some cigarettes. . . . Yes, I know he's gone. I've searched everywhere. . . ."

Westbrook hung up, stared at the doctor. "That's your fault," he growled. "You should have gone out with them—"

"Yes—to a hospital." He nodded Westbrook into the next room. Chalmers was giving the orders now. "Get one of your men you can trust and get him out hunting for Eric. This fever might take him anywhere.

"We can't have him running loose, not in his condition."

Westbrook made a half dozen phone calls, got a man out to look for Eric. "I guess that's all we can do for the time. Perhaps he's just out for a walk and will show up again—at least, Ann will scour City Manors."

"Doctor Smelzer corroborates everything I've told you," said Chalmers. "It *was* Irrahuarro Fever." He picked up his bag, started toward the door. "Give me a buzz if you hear anything."

But they didn't hear anything that day or the next. Eric had been swallowed up as completely as if he had fallen into a well—even the police in their city-wide search had nothing to report. As is often the case, the simplest, most logical places to search for news were neglected. Westbrook didn't think of the shipping circles nor of the bank until the morning of the third day.

His belated inquiries brought quick fruits. A ship, the S. S. *Para,* had cleared for a South American port the night Eric had disappeared.

The rest was easy. A radiogram to the captain of the *Para* brought back news of a lean, yellow-haired stowaway. The man's pockets were full of securities, money.

Dr. Chalmers was with Westbrook when he got the relayed message from the ship's owners. He didn't say a thing, just stared out the window. A faint smile was on the doctor's lips. Westbrook was already on the phone, ringing the bank.

"This is Wayne Westbrook of Westbrook & Company. Oh, hello, Johnson. I want to find out something about Eric Jensen, our man. Was he in there a couple of days ago? . . . He was? . . . Closed his account? Big bills, securities? . . . Oh, no, nothing wrong. Thanks. Good-by."

"Oh, no," said Westbrook mockingly after he had hung up. "No, everything is just fine!" He turned excitedly to the doctor. "Now it's a crazy man we're after, loaded to the gills with at least $25,000 on him."

Doctor Chalmers gave a short laugh. "A funny situation, Westbrook. A funny kind of fever that can keep a man's mind straight until he's settled up the financial part of his business! I'd say that, except for one thing, Eric was doing nothing more than escaping from a life that hated—"

Westbrook put down the phone book. "What's the one thing" he demanded.

"Come into Eric's office, I'll show you. It's something I found yesterday. It's impractical enough to make a fellow dizzy, but it kind of gets you."

INSIDE Eric's office, the doctor stopped in front of the seascape on the wall. The light was just right for the picture. The Viking's eyes were as blue-green as

the water that splashed against his heavy, well-muscled thighs, his hair that showed below the winged helmet as yellow as the sunlight that streamed all over the picture. "Take a good look at it," said the doctor. "It'll help to understand this other thing I'm going to show you."

He went over to the bookcase, took out a large, flat notebook wedged there. He came back, opened the book flat on the table.

"Eric's handwriting! Now, Westbrook, listen to this:

"'. . . and so this Viking longship never reached Vineland, the land first found by Lief Ericson. Lars Thorsen and his men, together with their families, were blown far off their course by the Great Storm that lashed the seas for twenty days. Lars Thorsen, a jarl in his own right, was leaving Norway to find a new home. Centuries before, the Vikings had been forced to do this very same thing—all because of the fateful words of the princess, Gyda. To Harald the Fairhair, she had said: "I marry thee when thou art King of Norway" whereupon Harald had conquered or driven out all noblemen and barons. The ones who took to the sea became Vikings.' "

DOCTOR CHALMERS paused. Ann had come in while he was reading. Now she said, breathing hard: "That's it. That's the name—Lars Thorsen! He—Eric, started to dictate a letter to Lars Thorsen the day before he disappeared—"

"Yes, I remember your telling me," said Westbrook. "But, say—this Thorsen was one of those Vikings! He's been dead for centuries!" He looked quickly at the doctor for co-operation.

Chalmers grinned like a man passing a lonely graveyard at dusk; and he was as silent.

"The man's crazy," insisted Westbrook. "I'll wire the ship to have him held. Ann, take this message to the ship:

CAPTAIN LAMBERT, S.S. *PARA*

PLEASE HOLD MAN IDENTIFIED AS ERIC JENSEN AGE THIRTY-FIVE HEIGHT SIX FEET TWO WEIGHT ONE HUNDRED SIXTY BLUE EYES LIGHT HAIR

Sign it with my name, Westbrook Exporting Company."

Ann dotted the last period and hurried into the reception room where Doctor Chalmers saw her twirl the telegraph button to summon a messenger. He said: "You can't make it stick, Westbrook. Your will won't be enough to get you action this time."

And thus it was proved. When the radio wire came back, it was collect; it said:

ERIC JENSEN PAID PASSAGE TO PORT OF CALL PARA BRAZIL

CAPTAIN C. LAMBERT

WESTBROOK raved until the doctor gently informed him that Eric, after all, was a free soul and that, fever or no fever, he had a right to go where he chose. "Even," said Chalmers, "if he was trying to run down a lost Viking."

"Is that what you think?" cried the big man.

Chalmers shook his head. A strange look spread across his kindly face. "Frankly, Westbrook, I don't know just what I do think. I've just found another page that was stuck by the wet ink; listen: 'So nothing was ever heard of this sea baron, whose faring before the storm could have ended in a thousand different inlets—' " Eric's handwriting ended here, but farther down the page, near the bottom, was the name "Ingrid" and "Rush to higher ground and wait—Eric."

Westbrook was too practical to see anything in that writing, although he did bite deeper into his cigar at the "rush to higher ground and wait—Eric." If that thought stirred his imagination at all he promptly covered it up with a sarcastic, "Now the whole thing's explained, huh?"

Doctor Chalmers swung around. "No, but in this Ingrid business there's a nice little love story, Westbrook. A hell of a nicer one than you arranged between Eric and Ann." He turned the pages of the notebook backwards, shoving it under Westbrook's eyes. Eric had done a lot of modern doodling and in the margins were penciled drawings he had made of battle-axes, spears, ancient swords—all arranged in more or less intricate designs. Inside each design, as if put there to be protected, was the name of Ingrid. As the doctor turned the pages the name of Ingrid was sure to be some place in the margin, the top or bottom of the page.

"So what?" growled Westbrook. "What does it mean?"

Chalmers shut the book hard. He went over to the window, looked out a minute. Then he came back. "If you weren't such a hard-headed, unimaginative old fool I could tell you what it means."

Westbrook's eyes gleamed. 'Okay, let's have it!" he demanded.

Chalmers nodded. "All right, mister. But I can already hear you saying 'rubbish.' It's this girl, Ingrid. Eric's in love with her. In love with a girl he's probably never seen. A girl that probably doesn't even exist—"

"Rubbish!"

The doctor grunted. "All right, that's over. Now think back, Wayne. Remember back as far as the sixth, seventh grade and your first love, little Mary Anderson! Remember how you used to write 'Mary' all over your books—"

"It was Alice," said Westbrook brusquely.

"Well, this one is Ingrid. And this one's Eric's first love. I don't know where he's going. But let him go, Westbrook. Don't try to stop him."

Ann came back in the room just as Westbrook caught up his hat. The big man stopped at the door. "I'm stopping Eric and having him held. Any captain on any ship can hold a crazy man and I'm getting a wire out from authorities that even Captain Lambert will heed. And I'm chartering a plane to Para!"

"You're an old fool," said Chalmers under his breath as he watched the big man stamp out. He turned and smiled into the frowning face of Ann.

"Doctor Chalmers," the girl said coldly, "I'd like to talk to you. A little while ago you gave the impression you thought we were holding Eric here against his will."

"Did I? Probably just concern for my patient, my dear——"

ANN waited. But evidently that was all there was going to be of an explanation. Her eyes smouldered when the doctor attempted to hide the pleased look on his face. "I think you're happy about the whole thing, about Eric's danger!" she cried.

"No, Ann, it's not that. It's just that at times I'm quite of an imaginative old cuss myself. Don't worry. It's probably all over already and the inexplicable touch of jungle fever has passed, and Eric will be detained at the port of call. I could have told Westbrook that Eric couldn't land without a passport, but Westbrook likes to think of those things himself. Anyway, for a few days, until the fever passes, Eric will be with the girl he loves —a girl who doesn't even exist!"

Doctor Chalmers put Eric's notebook back on the shelf dripping with Viking lore, back among the books where legend had it that Lief Ericson, reputed son of Eric the Red, had first discovered America. Then, under the cold eyes of the girl, he started toward the door.

"I'll be in my office downstairs. If anything comes up, please let me know." He gave a last look at Eric's treasures, sighed and shuffled out of the room.

As soon as the door closed, Ann rushed to the bookcase, tore down the notebook. Breathing hard, she swept through the pages. Unladylike words cut from her curled lips as she tore the book into many pieces and threw the pieces into the wastebasket. After a while she picked up the wastebasket, took it down the hall and dumped it into the trash bin. Then she came back and sat down to wait for Westbrook's phone call.

Before Westbrook phoned, the doctor was back again. "Oh, excuse me, Miss Allen," he said. "I just wanted to see Eric's book again."

Ann was busy with a couple of customers. But her laugh was a loud, shrill challenge. "Go ahead," she cried. "Help yourself!"

But Doctor Chalmers didn't get to see that book then or ever. The phone rang. It was Westbrook and he wanted to speak to Chalmers. He said:

"I've seen the proper authorities, Doc. Under certain conditions they can hold a man on a ship, and this is one of those conditions. They can't exactly arrest him, but they can hold him in sick bay. Crazy, see? The *Para's* got a plane aboard and they'll bring the 'sick man' into Para town a day ahead of schedule. Hold everything, I'll be right up."

A MOMENT after the doctor hung up the phone rang again. Ann, taking the message, nearly dropped the phone. After a minute she hung up, looked at the longhand message she had taken in her notebook. She passed it over to the doctor. "This is from the Steamship Company's office—a message back from the *Para*."

Chalmers read it:

> Eric Jensen detained after furious struggle. It took seven men to finally overpower him.

This was but one of a series of startling messages that were phoned into the Westbrook office. The second message came a few moments after Westbrook came wading into the office:

> Eric Jensen escapes the ship's brig. A madman, with the strength of a dozen seamen, says the captain. Armed with an axe from the ship's carpenter shop, he is holding half the ship's men at bay.

A half-hour later came the next and final message:

> Captain Lambert reports that Eric Jensen has reclaimed his money from the purser. Before anyone could stop him he departed with the ship's plane. He left five thousand dollars behind.

"Hell and tarnation!" cried Chalmers. He danced around the room as if he had just heard that the Terrymen had beat Brooklyn.

"I can't believe it," cried Ann. "Eric was always so gentle, backward—I can't believe it's the same Eric!"

Chalmers' eyes danced. "It's a different Eric all right."

Westbrook was breathing heavily. His gray eyes had just a flicker of admiration in them. But even now he didn't give up. "I'm taking that plane to Para. It still goes. I'm leaving in an hour!"

Doctor Chalmers held his breath. Then he began muttering admonitions to himself. "Get any foolish ideas out of your head. You've got a practice to care for. You've got contacts—" His voice rose louder, and it was plain that he had no intention of heeding his own advice. "I'll throw some things into a bag, Westbrook! I'm going with you!"

ERIC JENSEN was rapidly nearing the Brazilian coast in the ship's plane. He was alone. And he was free. The fever still burned in his eyes, unshaded by the afternoon sun which hit against his

hair flying in the wind. Somewhere along the line Eric had lost his hat. But that was behind him and Eric's gaze was ahead, never backward.

Suddenly below him showed the wide expansion of discoloration where the muddy waters of the mighty Amazon pushed back the sea. Soon came the mouth of the mighty river, with its hundreds of small islands, then the river itself.

He kicked his rudder, turned straight up the river, searching for a familiar landmark. Searched for it in a place which was as foreign to him as it would have been to a jarl from Norway. A few moments later he was out of sight of the sea, following a huge silvery snake that wound in and out of the jungle. Then again he was back at the lake-wide Amazon, now following its course as unerring as a bird returning to its nest.

His parched lips opened in a soft spoken admonition. "Patience, Ingrid—"

Soon he gave a soft cry and kicked the rudder over. Again he followed a silvery snake off into the jungle. This time it was the right one. The Irrahuarro.

Now the jungle looked like a huge billowy carpet of green. More terrifying to aviators than the sea with a clear horizon, for to crash here was to crash out of the zone of a passing ship. A plane breaking through the upper branches of jungle trees might impale itself and be lost forever.

But Eric's eyes were searching only ahead. His steadily droning plane sped across that jungle, as straight as if Eric knew exactly where he was going.

Miles from the sea coast a small hill rose slightly above the darker green. Here the vegetation was slighter, in places the rocky ground could be seen. Then Eric saw a clearing far below. A small expanse of meadow at the bottom of the hill's slope. A wisp of smoke floated skyward.

Eric cut off the gas. The plane's motor popped and stuttered above the primeval forest, while Eric circled the clearing and prepared to land.

THE wisp of smoke showed him the wind direction. He lost altitude rapidly, concentrating on the difficult landing. He didn't have time to notice the scurrying natives below or see their wild faces turned skyward. He held the stick steady, called out the directions as if he had memorized this special landing:

"Now drop it between those trees . . . slip it . . . nose it in . . . flatten out. Cut the switch . . . kick over the rudder!"

With the wild skill of a stunt pilot, Eric had dropped his plane into that small landing place. Damp, clinging dust rose from the ground as the plane ploughed to a stop. Even as his plane came to a stop the wild cry of howling natives filled Eric's ears.

He leaped from his plane, a wilder cry coming from his feverish lips. A shout of challenge!

The battle was already on. Yet it had stopped momentarily when Eric's plane came vaulting out of the sky. The sound now was of fear, fear coming from the thoats of naked blacks scurrying back into the jungle.

Then Eric saw the Norsemen. He yelled a mighty cry of greeting and ran up the slope toward them.

The Vikings of old were making their last stand on higher ground. There was Old Lars Thorsen, the yellow-haired leader, with an ox-horned helmet upon his head. There was Avaak, the red-haired, Jorg, foster son of Hilgard; in all, a score of gigantic warriors, helmeted and mailed. Great lean men they were, with hair nearly reaching their broad shoulders, huge swords and battle-axes in their hands. Their blue eyes still blazed as some peered toward the jungle into which their foes had run.

Eric ran toward these waiting men. He

knew them all. They were his friends, the friends whom he had never before seen.

And here, too, was Ingrid.

A SLIM slip of a girl, barefoot, clad in a single garment—that was Ingrid. Her eyes were wide, her face as radiant as the sunshine of her hair which flattened against her soft cheeks and fell in a single braid across one slender shoulder. She took a step forward, the white gown clinging to her limbs, showing the flesh beneath.

The girl hesitated, stopped. She seemed like a white goddess in that jungle wilderness. But the wistful, appealing look she gave Old Lars when she turned toward him was entirely human. When Old Lars nodded, Ingrid gave a soft cry and waited no longer.

"Eric!" she cried, running to meet him. Her two hands were outstretched and the look that came over her white face was incredible in its softness. "Eric, beloved. Is it really thou?"

Eric clasped her into his arms. "It is, Ingrid. I have come to wed thee." His blue eyes looked deeply into hers, found that which sealed their pact. The Norsemen looked on with friendly, approving eyes.

Suddenly the weird throb of drums began to come from the jungle. The Norsemen straightened—all except Old Lars who had stood braced on his two legs. The Viking chief leaned heavily against one of his men, and Eric, looking at him, saw that he was wounded. Watching, he felt Ingrid's body tremble against his.

The old Norseman's eyes shone brightly, proudly as he looked at Eric. "Come, my son."

Eric's arms still entwined with Ingrid's as he moved toward the gaunt Viking. The girl disengaged her arm, her voice in Eric's ear. "Go alone, Eric. It is council for thee and Lars Thorsen alone."

Eric's eyes followed those of the old Viking. Halfway down the slope were several fire-blackened squares where, doubtless, buildings had stood. But Old Lars said not a word about that, his actions and looks were enough. He drew his battle-scarred sword, handed it hilt first to Eric. His voice was low, vibrantly alive: "Lead them, my son."

THE beat of the jungle drums came louder, increasing in tempo and volume—a prelude to attack. The sinister throb of danger was a fit attendant to Eric's acceptance of the sword of leadership.

A far cry from the fjords of Norway, all this, and the Brazilian jungle. As strange as the circumstances which had brought the giant warriors halfway around the world to meet their destiny. As strange as the man who had once been a slight, stoop-shouldered office executive—Eric Jensen, far removed, but still a direct descendant of Harald the Fairhair. With twenty good Norse warriors behind him, he stood waiting, his blue eyes blazing down the slope.

The native drums stopped, ending on a booming beat. A hundred naked savages came leaping from the jungle, straight for the slope. A few went swarming to the plane, battering it to pieces.

This time the natives' attack stopped halfway up the slope. It was met by a young Norseman whose wild battle cry froze the blood in their veins. The ferocity of the yellow-haired leader with the upraised sword brought terror to their hearts. More terrifying even than the giant Norsemen with upthrust spears who came leaping down the hill behind their leader.

"Hew the Black *Scraelings!*" cried Eric.

The Vikings charged on. Bronze-spiked leather shields graced their left forearms, tunics flapping madly against mighty muscled thighs, steel swords flashed in the sunshine. But thrown spears came first.

Then the two forces from the different ends of the earth met in mortal combat.

Native arrows glanced from mailed chests. Then the Norsemen were in close, fighting with short swords, swinging battle-axes.

Eric's wild laugh rang above the din. He leaped at the leader of the Black *Scraelings*.

His huge sword cleaved through the wooden shaft of the chief's spear, thrust on through the native's breast. Eric yelled out, "Saavad! Jorg!" and led on.

No human flesh could stand against the attack of the Vikings and their terrible battle-axes that cleaved through bone and muscle. And it was too much for these natives of the upper river. A wounded *Scraeling* cried out:

"It is a white god! He has come from the sky to avenge his people!"

The natives did not linger to stare at the golden-haired Eric nor to look at the settlement houses they had burned. With a cry of new terror they fled into the jungle, leaving their dead behind.

Eric leaned on his ancient sword and watched them go. All danger was now past. To his side came the slip of a girl, the lovely Ingrid. Her eyes were wet with happiness.

"Thou art my king, Eric," she said simply. She held out her hand. "Come."

IT WAS two days later when Wayne Westbrook and Doctor Chalmers arrived at Para, where they chartered another plane, a small cabin Amphibian. Soon they had crossed the jungle to the Amazon. The Brazilian pilot kept one wary eye on the tangled mass of jungle and swirling water, sparing a look every once in a while at his two passengers, whom he probably thought were crazy.

Chalmers' eyes were bright with excitement as he tapped the pilot on the shoulder. "Watch for the Irrahuarro River!" To Westbrook he said. "The whole length of the Irrahuarro is full of small swamps—the only place Eric's fever could have come from! If Eric can be found at all it'll be there."

Westbrook nodded. He sat silent, staring below. Finally he said to the pilot, "Did you ever hear any tales of huge white men, jungle goddesses in the jungle?"

The swarthy pilot, watching his instrument board uneasily, nodded. "Oh, yes, *Senhor*. Everyone has heard of them." He scoffed at the idea, giving a little laugh. "I like the goddess of the Narajos best; she comes riding down a moonbeam to visit with their dead—"

At last the pilot waved below. "This, perhaps, is the Irrahuarro, *Senhores*," he cried.

Doctor Chalmers didn't try to hide his excitement. "Up it, man."

They flew on until the eagle-eyed pilot said "hello" and pointed down.

Westbrook and Chalmers saw it now—a slope of a hill, a small clearing. A smashed plane. From the air the plane looked like a broken bird. "Down lower," Westbrook ordered, and the pilot began to circle, losing altitude.

Doctor Chalmers stared and the expectant, hopeful light went out of his eyes. He sighed and gripped the seat of the plane. "If he's alive it's a miracle," he breathed.

"Land us down there!" ordered Westbrook. At the startled look in the pilot's eyes he cried out: "A thousand dollars."

The pilot's eyes turned craftily; he tugged at his small mustache as if it were part of his flying mechanism. "American dollars, *Senhor?* The Indians are bad!"

"Yes, American dollars."

THE flyer nosed the amphibian plane down the river, watched the top of the trees to see which way the wind blew. Then he came back up the river and made an easy landing on the muddy stream. He was even able to taxi up to the shore of the clearing. Under the pilot's grinning ap-

praisal of his own craftsmanship, Doctor Chalmers and Westbrook leaped ashore and ran toward the wrecked plane.

"Take it easy," shouted Chalmers. "Nobody could have survived a crash like this."

Westbrook nodded. But he had to be sure. A moment later he was crying excitedly from the inside of the broken plane. "Hey! Eric's not in here. There's nobody in here."

"My God!"

The strange light of hope that had been in Chalmers' eyes was born again. Breathing hard, he stared around him, stared at the cold fires where the huts had burned. He started up the slope, stumbled over something in his path. Reaching down he picked up an ancient winged helmet. "My God," he cried again. "A Norseman's helmet in a Brazilian jungle!"

A cry from Westbrook tore his eyes away from the ancient relic. "Look here!" shouted Westbrook. He pointed to the side where a native's dead body was impaled by a spear.

Chalmers came up, shaking his head in bewilderment. He ran a shaking hand over the rusty shaft and muttered under his breath. "This is Norse, too. And the native is an Irrahuarro from the upper river—I know the tribe."

Chalmers leaped ahead. "Here's another. And another, all dead. This one looks as if he'd been cleaved with—with a—" He looked askance into Westbrook's face.

Westbrook looked sick, but he finished the sentence for him. "A broad-axe?"

"Yes, a broad-axe!"

They found other naked savages on the way up the slope. All had jagged wounds, the like of which the jungle had never before seen. The two white men looked at each other. Then they hurried on. Each appeared to be fearing what the other would ask.

But no sign of Eric did they find. The puzzle was still unsolved, more mysterious than ever. Westbrook made a faint half-hearted attempt at an explanation—"When Eric landed he cracked up. He was either killed or wounded. After the natives got over their fright at seeing the plane land, they took away the body of Eric—"

"But the others?" Chalmers waved his hand down the slope. "You can't explain away those bodies. Or the manner in which the natives died. No, Westbrook, it's got to be a better explanation than that!" Chalmers shook his head slowly and the odd hopeful light flamed in his eyes anew.

"Then, what?"

"I don't know. I don't want to appear stubborn, but I'll bet my practice that somehow Eric's— Oh, damn it! A man that had the guidance that Eric had couldn't have come to an ignominious end by crashing to death in a jungle. No, Westbrook, it had to be different than that. It's got to be different!"

They had made the top of the hill, which was only a few feet above the jungle. Below, the pilot of the chartered amphibian was looking curiously at the wreckage of Eric's plane.

Westbrook apparently didn't know what to say. He looked at the broken shaft of the old spear he had picked up on his way up the hill. He poked idly into the rectangular patch of underbrush directly in front of him. The spearhead tapped against stone. Westbrook swished aside the brush and grass. He stared. And suddenly exclaimed.

CHALMERS leaped to his side, stared, too. He staggered a little, caught himself and tore aside the underbrush. The squared effect was caused by its having once been an enclosure. Inside this enclosure a tree had grown around a rusty broad-axe, leaving but a glimpse of the rusty blade, part of the handle.

A number of stone markers still showed through the underbrush. Ancient graves!

Doctor Chalmers pushed aside a branch from the largest of the stone markers. Still visible were the markings, telling who slept below. Chalmers' voice was filled with awe as he read the inscription; it sounded strange and hollow in that jungle wilderness.

"Lars Thorsen."

Chalmers and Westbrook looked at each other. Then they pushed through the ancient graveyard looking at each one of the markers. They met again, shook their heads. This indeed was something beyond any sort of ordinary explanation.

Westbrook breathed aloud. "There was no Ingrid," he said. He looked quickly, added, "And there was no Eric."

Chalmers cleared his throat and looked at the ground.

Sometime later the two men were back in the chartered plane. Their half-hour's further search, apparently, had been to no avail.

The pilot looked at them curiously, but he said nothing; the Americans were good pay. He took a last look at the smashed plane, made a note of its make and position in his book. "Shall we go now, *Senhores?*" he said at last.

Westbrook looked around for the last time. "Might as well," he said. He shuddered, twisting his mouth toward Chalmers. "I'm afraid that's the last we'll hear of Eric Jensen. I never thought I'd ever run up against anything that couldn't be explained. But somehow this fever preyed on his brain and brought him back to the place of its origin. How? We'll never know that. We're up against a mystery too great for our puny minds to grasp—let alone explain."

Doctor Chalmers made no comment until he had stowed away a winged helmet he had brought along for a souvenir. "I think Eric would like to have it put in his collection; he hasn't got one."

Westbrook grunted.

"We go, *Senhores,*" said the pilot as he prepared to start the engine. His eyes nervously scanned the river for anything that might interfere with the takeoff.

Westbrook, taking a final look at the small hillock, didn't see the look of peace which had come over Doctor Chalmers' face.

IT WAS more than that. It was an unholy look of exultation, which had no right to be there. No man had the right to look like that in the face of such phenomena. But Doctor Chalmers sat back in his plane seat, grinning to himself, as a rabid baseball fan might have, after he had just watched a member of his team put the ball over the fence to win the game in the last half of the ninth inning.

Doctor Chalmers' keen eyes had seen something that Westbrook had overlooked. He had seen marks that showed where a small dugout canoe had slid off the soft dirt bank into the river. In the sliding tracks of the dugout were the imprints of a girl's bare feet and the unmistakable rubber heel prints of a white man's dress shoes. The two pair of tracks had been very close together—

Doctor Chalmers sighed happily as if he could see far down the Amazon a good two days below the tributary Irrahuarro. If a small dugout was there, it would be floating on toward the sea—

And in it would be two persons, fair-haired, blue-eyed. Eric and Ingrid. Intact in Eric's pockets would be his negotiable papers and United States currency, which the fever had not stopped him from claiming in New York. Fully he had come into his strange fantastic heritage. With Ingrid at his side he could now look forward into a future no man could envisage, for a modern had become one with the ancient gods.

Alone in the empty dwelling she felt the presence of one of those things our reason tells us is not there, but which our nerves and senses proclaim beyond all possibility of denial.

A Bargain With the Dead

By SEABURY QUINN

MATILDA knelt on the first of the three steps leading to the chancel, her hands joined palm to palm, her fingertips just touching the dimple that cleft her chin. The altar was ablaze with candlelight, decked with roses and white lilac as for a wedding, and the scent of flowers mingled with the incense. From the grilled stalls where the choir sisters knelt the muted voices came as softly as a light breeze soughing through an enclosed shaded garden:

. . . the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee,
And the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.
Alleluja!

The four bridesmaids with ceremonial overveils of crimson crêpe above their veils of black bunting had fallen back and grouped around her in a semi-circle. One had the Arum lily she had held in her right hand when she entered the chapel, another the tall lighted candle she had carried in her left, the third had taken up the silver alms basin to catch the hair that would be cropped with the long shears held by the fourth when her profession had been made. The chaplain, looking rather hot and uncomfortable in embroidered chasuable and Jerusalem cope, was bending over her. "Matilda, wilt thou freely and without reserve vow holy poverty unto the Lord?"

She heard, but dimly, hardly comprehendingly, as if the question had been whispered at her bedside while she was still asleep. It all seemed so unreal, so like a dream. She might have been an actress in an unconvincing play, or perhaps a real person in a world of gentle but uncomprehending phantoms. Why, she asked herself almost impersonally, was she there? . . .

Ever since she could remember Matilda Johnstone had known she was different from other girls. Other children played and romped, she walked sedately at her mother's side. Other little girls had frilly, lace-trimmed under-pretties, sometimes with satin ribbons on them. Matilda's little nainsook waists and panties were severely, plainly utilitarian. Other little girls wore socks or sometimes ran in barefoot freedom. Summer and winter Matilda wore long, heavy, ribbed stockings of black cotton and high-laced boots. At an age when other little girls were reveling in the adventures of Dorothy and Toto in the Wonderful Land of Oz she was memorizing the Book of Common Prayer and learning the hymnal by rote. She never had a chum or playmate, for until her twelfth year her mother acted as her teacher. A very strict and most efficient teacher. She spoke French and Spanish fluently and read Greek and Latin texts at sight. Algebra she mastered by her tenth birthday and plane geometry before her twelfth.

At thirteen she was entered at the school kept by the Sisters of Nazareth at Harrisonville, New Jersey, where she boarded the year round and studied without intermission. By the time she was fifteen she had absorbed all the sisters had to teach and went back to her mother's house, which could be called a home only by the most torturing stretch of courtesy.

IT WAS a small, forbidding frame cottage with a frowning doorway and an air of almost sinister silence. The shingle roof was grayish-brown with age, the clapboards wanted painting, the steps that led up to the narrow porch were weather-warped, and some of their planks were loose. Inside the place seemed musty, as if it had been shut up a long time. In every room there was a smell of dust and scuffing leather, mildewed fabric and decay.

After the cleanly brightness of the convent school the house was like a prison and the silent, watchful-eyed woman who had met her at the station like a wardress or (she thought with a convulsive tightening of her throat) a mad woman who had somehow contrived to secure custody of a sane person.

"You do not care for it here, do you, Matilda?" asked her mother after dinner on the second day of her return. The meal had been a silent one preceded and followed by prayers of thanksgiving the length and eloquence of which were out of all proportion to both quality and quantity of food.

"Well, frankly, Mother, it isn't very

cheerful, and you seem to lead such a lonely life—"

"We are withdrawn from the world, child. We have no need of human friendships."

"The sisters at Mount Nazareth are withdrawn from the world, too," Matilda began, and stumbled on her reply. For the first time she realized her mother's eyes were curiously pewter-gray and had a trick of sliding away obliquely to lose themselves under their lashes, like someone peeping skillfully beneath the drawn blind of a window.

"The sisters?"

"Why, yes, they—"

"Perhaps you'd like to live with them? Be one of them?" The question was casually put, almost too casually, for the momentary brightening of her mother's eyes betrayed some inner, secret excitement.

Matilda had not thought of it. She had been eager for the world as a young bird for its first flight, but at the question she compared the damp, cold cheerlessness of the house with the nunnery where the white-robed sisters passed along the phlox—and zenia-bordered sunlit walks as they read from their books of hours, or went silent-footed about their duties in the rooms and corridors, or wafted quietly as dedicated ghosts, hands hidden in the loose sleeves of their habits, to chant the offices of nones or compline in the chapel. "Yes, I should," she answered almost sharply. "I'd love it."

"You're sure of that?" Her mother's voice was low, but her eyes were on her with a hard insistence.

"Of course."

"You'll swear it?"

The intent, almost eager look in her mother's face startled her, but she kept her voice controlled and level. "Yes, Mother, if you wish it."

Mrs. Johnstone propped the family Bible on the seat of the dining chair before which Matilda knelt as before a priedieu, leafted through it till it opened at the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, and pointed to the black-letter text of the twenty-second verse: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God thou shalt not slack to pay it, for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee. . . ."

"You understand that this is absolutely irrevocable, of course?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Then lay your hands upon the Book and vow as you have hope of everlasting life that when you are eighteen you will present yourself as an aspirant at the convent at Mount Nazareth and progress through postulancy and novitiate to your vows of perpetual obligation as a nun."

"I vow to do so, Mother."

"And may the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death deter me from the keeping of this, my solemn vow and oblation," her mother dictated.

"Amen," responded Matilda and bent to kiss the page.

HOW Janet Minchin came to marry Evans Johnstone was a mystery inscrutable as one of faith. A gentlewoman leaving home and family to follow after a gypsy would have seemed scarcely more incongruous. Her father had been vicar of an obscure North Country parish, a fragile man with thinning fair hair and eyes that glowed with mystic fervor as he expounded a theology as narrow as the grave, and as harsh and inexorable. His ghostly devotion centered on High Church, his earthly duty was to High Toryism and the House of Lords, especially the Lords Spiritual.

Janet had been thirty when he died, poor as any mouse that foraged in the sacristy, and her character and habits were already moulded by her background. She was piously reverential rather than religious.

When Evensong was intoned by the young Oxford esthete who had taken her father's place she felt a glow akin to exaltation as he stood before the altar rail and raised his hand in benediction; at the solemn celebration of the Eucharist she knew positive ecstasy. Had it been possible for her to join one of the Anglican sisterhoods she might have spent a life of negatively peaceful cloistered happiness, but however much the sisterhoods might have been preoccupied with spiritual considerations they also had a practical and worldly side. Unlike this Church they received no support from the Crown, their endowments were few and small and their incomes uncertain. The woman who aspired to membership must have a dowry of at least a hundred pounds. All told Janet's capital was less than twenty. She was well educated in a noncommercial sort of way, with a wide knowledge of things that constituted culture, and none at all of things concerned with the business of life.

She was also obviously well bred, a perfect example of the British middle class. So presently we find her name inscribed with those of other "gentlewomen in reduced circumstances" on the rolls of Berstein, Wallace & Macumber, placement specialists, and later still we see her installed as nursery governess in the near-palatial duplex apartment of Nathan Walitzky in East Sixty-seventh Street.

It was on a bright May morning she met Evans. The trees in Central Park were burgeoning and sparrows bickered noisily as they set up housekeeping. Open-topped green buses waddled up and down Fifth Avenue like dowagers in flowered bonnets and the freshly turned soil of the flower beds smelt sweet and warm. The ten-year-old Walitzky twins Sylvia and Valérie played shrilly and—for a wonder—amicably on the crocus-studdied grass a dozen yards or so away, and Janet put the tooled red leather book of poems down while she wiped a nostalgic tear away. She had been reading:

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

In point of sober fact cold rain was probably sweating against the windows of Kew at that moment, and wind as bitter as a witch's curse was keening through the trembling trees while flocks of rain-drenched starlings huddled disconsolately beneath the eaves. Moreover, Janet had never seen Kew, or London, for that matter, but that made no practical difference. Kew was England for her, England was home, and she was racked with home sickness.

She looked pretty and appealing with her smooth fresh complexion and blue-gray eyes heavy-lidded and agleam with tears. But her real beauty was the long fair hair drawn back as smoothly as a Madonna's and arranged in a loose figure 8 at the nape of her neck. Seeing that wealth of jonquil-colored hair one overlooked the fact that her features were so finely cut they verged on sharpness, that her lips were a trifle too thin and her body one more of lines and angles than of curves.

Seeing the glory of her sun-haloed hair the young man walking southward through the Park came to a halt beside her. "Is anything wrong—can I help?" he asked.

SHE looked up quickly, ready to repel impertinence, but the small frown gathering between her slim brows gave way to a slight smile as she took stock of him. He carried himself well, not slouchily like most Americans, there was no stoop in his back, and his tweeds had the shade of peat-smoke in them and the smell of moss and turf about them. His face was

thin. Two lines almost like saber-scars ran down his cheeks and his square hard-shaven chin was firm as his lips were whimsical. His eyes were keen and rather tired, but there was a frank, friendly smile in them. There was about him the look of close acquaintanceship with many places and all types of people.

"There's nothing wrong that you can help," she told him as the ghost of a smile formed at the corners of her mouth. "I'm just homesick, and miserable."

"H'm'm. English, aren't you?"

"Of course." She seemed astonished and mildly offended at the question, as if he'd asked if she were honest or literate.

"I know just how you feel. I was in England once, and it seemed the boat for home would never sail."

"You"—incredulity put a slight edge on her voice—"you mean you *wanted* to leave England?"

He grinned, and there was something impish in his face. "Well, it wasn't so much I wanted to leave England as that I wanted to come home. It doesn't matter greatly where home is, we always want to go there, don't we? But you'll get used to this in time. Why, after you've been in New York a few years you'll be as eager as anyone to catch the next boat when you go back to England for a visit. Keep the chin up."

"Thank you. I'll try."

He touched his hat in farewell, then with an air of almost boyish diffidence, "I hope you didn't mind my speaking to you. You looked so wretched—"

Her manner grew a little constrained. One had to hold these over-friendly unconventional Americans at arm's length. "I don't see why I should object. I am a lady and you seem a gentleman."

"Thanks," he answered ironically, then, with quick generousness, " I hope I helped a little. It's dreadful to be alone in a strange land with no one to talk to."

She arraigned herself at the bar of her conscience. For an English gentlewoman to permit a stranger, and especially an American, to speak to her was definitely a solicism. She must never speak to him again. Not that there was much danger of it. New York had seven million people. Their meeting had been a chance one. It was unlikely they would ever see each other. . . .

Next morning she was at the same bench at the same time and before half an hour had passed he came swinging down the path. Her heart beat faster and she turned her head aside, but, "Good morning," he greeted, and she looked up, blushing hotly. A little smile came into his eyes, found its echo in hers, and—it was suddenly as if they'd known each other always.

Their intimacy ripened with the summer. From casual meetings they progressed to a definite schedule, within a week they called each other by their first names; before June roses had supplanted May lilacs the diffident handclasps with which they met and parted had given way to kisses. Not passionate embraces, to be sure, but kisses, nevertheless, with none of the essentials missing. They were married in September.

WITH just a little more patience and understanding, a little more bearing and forebearing, their marriage might have been ideal. But these were qualities neither of them possessed.

Evans was assistant city editor of *The Crescent*, and had fallen heir to more than his share of the newspaperman's common legacy of human frailties. He was cynical and utterly without illusions, nervous, and more than safely fond of drink. The piety that was her heritage and background irritated him. "Faith is believing what you know ain't so," he liked to quote. The ritual of the high church where she worshiped he characterized as a twelfth car-

bon copy of Roman Catholicism. Pragmatic and objective in his outlook on life he could not understand that what was meaningless theatricalism to him was a spiritually satisfying drama to her.

When he came home in a jovial mood, comfortably fuddled with Scotch, she reproached him for swinish drunkenness; when he secured tickets for some musical comedy or revue she often refused to go with him, suggesting that he take some of his bottle-companions to the vulgar exhibition. Her whole life had conditioned her to regard inhibition as an end in itself. The world, the flesh and the Devil composed for her the hideous trinity of sin, and that which savored of the world or flesh, was to be feared and shunned and hated as much as Apollyon himself.

So they tore love to pieces pulling stubbornly in opposite directions. Evans lapsed into a state of almost constant alcoholic sulkiness, but if he repented his bargain he never said so; never reproached her. As for Janet, she both loved and hated Evans, but gradually the dreadful realization grew that she hated him more than she loved him.

Fate broke the deadlock. The signals on the fog-blinded Third Avenue L went wrong one rush hour, the wooden cars fell crashing to the cobbled street, and Evans' was among the bodies taken to Bellevue.

The city editor, who knew something of how things stood, attempted to be kind and tactful. He called the Reverend Goeffrey Pancoast, rector of Saint Simeon's, asking him to break the news to Janet. And the cleric, more concerned with souls than bodies, perhaps smarting under the sting of some things Evans had said concerning ritualistic Anglicanism, ended his message of tragedy with the dreadful announcement, "He died in mortal sin, my daughter."

Then Janet knew that what she had thought hate was just the sting of pique and wounded vanity, that always and forever she would love Evans; that while she lived her heart would cleave to his memory as the tides swing to the moon. Beside his welfare nothing mattered. She remembered Father Pancoast's sermon of Ash Wednesday: "When the poor damned have writhed a hundred million years in the unquenching flame, if they call through the glowing grilles of hell, 'How long?' the answer will come back, 'Eternity has just begun!' "

She would gladly have offered her own body to be burned in his stead, but such vicarious atonement was impossible. Could she retire from the world into some sisterhood and spend her life in prayer and works of reparation in penitence for him? That too was denied her, for Evans' child was stirring underneath her heart, she must provide for it; look to its spiritual and bodily welfare.

But if her life were circumscribed the child's was not. Through it the father's tortured spirit might find surcease from its torment and come at last to everlasting bliss. With the insurance money Evans left she moved to an unfashionable suburb, bought a cottage and husbanded the fund like any miser. When presently her daughter had been born her life was mapped out in advance, plotted and charted for her as a ship's course is by some master mariner.

Now the consummation of her plans was almost reached. Brought up unspotted from the world, immune to earthly love and guarded carefully against inordinate affections, Matilda had vowed to give herself to religion, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice for the sins of her father. She would not be eighteen for three years and the Sisterhood of Nazareth would not consider an aspirant of less age, but with care the little money remaining could be made to support them and leave sufficient for Matilda's dowry when she entered the order.

HEADLINES bawled and shrieked across the front pages of the newspapers. Bull-voiced newsboys amplified the details of the tragic ending of an era: "Stock Market Crashes! Banks Fail!" *Variety*, that buffoon among journals, grinned Pagliacci-like through its dismayed panic and quipped, "Wall Street Lays an Egg!"

The cry that brought Matilda from the kitchen to her mother's side was half a sob, half terrified exclamation. Janet Johnstone sat by the window, her face like weather-grayed plaster, tears rolling down her cheeks. "The finger of the Lord has touched us, child."

"Why, Mother—"

"Our money—all we had to live on, all I've hoarded for your dowry when you are wedded to the Heavenly Bridegroom—is gone. We are paupers." There was flat and final tragedy in the words. Their tone was empty as the echo in the craters of a dead world.

"But we'll not starve, Mother. I learned stenography and typing at the convent. I can take dictation in three languages and transcribe ninety words a minute—"

Something—not hope exactly, but something akin to it—brightened in her mother's eyes. "You might support yourself with your typing, but I'd be a burden to you, and your dowry—"

"We can manage that, too. I don't know what they'll pay me, but we can live on it, and put a little bit aside each week until we have enough. They only want two thousand dollars, and after all that isn't very much. Suppose it takes us twenty years to save it. What of it? I'll be only thirty-five by then, and that will leave almost a lifetime to devote to religion—"

The urge to take her daughter in her arms and cuddle her against her breast was almost overpowering, but Janet fought it down. Since Matilda had been a small, red, wrinkled bundle, mostly squirms and squalls, she'd yearned to fondle her, to hold her tightly to her boson and whisper the nonsensical small things that mothers have whispered to their babes since the Angel of the Flaming Sword was set on guard beside the Gates of Paradise, but that had been her cross, her penance. Matilda had to be brought up unspotted from the world, free of inordinate affections. Love begets love and tenderness breeds tenderness. Suppose her daughter learned to love her so she could not bear to leave her? Would she not then be guilty of compromising the avoidance of her vow? Would she not be doubly a traitress, false to her compact with heaven, false to Evans who every moment suffered torment where Their Fire Is Not Quenched and yearned for the release his daughter's oblation would some day buy for him?

"You are a good girl, Matilda," she said, and added as an afterthought, "but be sure to stack the dishes neatly in the pantry tonight. Last night you mixed the Dresden with the Minton."

FOR hours Janet had walked a frustrated diamond-shaped pattern in her room. Now she was so tired, fatigue had become almost impersonal, and her legs moved with a jerky motion suggestive of a marionette.

Her hands and feet were numb as if they had been chilled for a long time, her brow and cheeks were burning, and there was a fine pain in the hollows of her shoulders. Her eyes scalded with tears that would not come, and there was a scratchy, sandy feeling in her throat. From every corner of the chamber shadows leered at her, ugly, faceless things that seemed to have the power to outstare her. What if she lived to be an old woman? What if she fell ill and doctors' bills ate up the dowry fund? What if she lay a helpless paralytic in some hospital when the time had come for Matilda to be received in the

sisterhood? Could she—*dared* she—live to let that come to pass?

She fumbled for the matches, lit the candle on her desk and scrawled a line across a sheet of note paper: "Remember your vow." Then she put a shawl about her narrow shoulders and walked without haste but with no air of leisure toward the railway station.

A dawn breeze whispered through the quiet streets like a spirit walking, and in the east there was the faintest streak of light. Posts, fences, letter boxes became dimly visible and the wheel-polished rails that led toward New York gleamed like silver in the gloom. She stepped down between them, began to walk.

The ridge that marked the Palisades was faintly luminous along its top, soon its blueness would be brightened by the first rays of the sun. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help," she murmured as the cricket-chirp of rails that felt the coming burden of the train became louder. "My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. . . ."

The locomotive's long-drawn scream of protest was like a blast of wind become hysterically articulate. The grinding clatter of the brakes was like the clang of armored men who meet in battle, and the hissing of the steam like the heart-broken, self-accusing sigh of one who has unwittingly caused tragedy.

"Jeez!" said the fireman.

"She must 'a' been deef as a post. I di'n'd see her till we wuz a'most on top' o' her, but if she'd heard th' whistle she'd 'a' had time to jump clear!" the engineer defended.

"This'll make us half an hour late!" the conductor complained.

The brightness of the hilltops had the sheen of burnished copper now, and streams of luminance washed down into the lowlands. The sun, a disc of glowing scarlet, poised on the rim of the horizon like a plate poised by a juggler. Full day had come, but for Janet Johnstone it was the night that has no dawn.

EIGHT years in New York had worked startling changes in Matilda. The lanky, spindle-shanked youngster had blossomed into an exceptionally attractive young woman with waving light brown hair which she wore braided in a heavy coronal, a broad white forehead, wide-spaced hazel eyes that seemed to deepen their shade as you looked into them, and a mouth with full red lips that seemed to turn up at the corners. Her chin was small and pointed, but cleft by a deep dimple, and delicate hollows showed beneath her cheek-bones. There was not an ounce of surplus flesh on her small bones, but she was not thin, only finely modeled with that graceful slenderness the old Greek sculptors loved to give their nymphs and lesser goddesses.

Depression held the country in its grip when she came to the metropolis, but a girl who could take notes in English, French and Spanish at a hundred and eighty words a minute and transcribe them tirelessly at a rate of ninety—and was willing to work for fifteen dollars a week—did not long lack employment.

She had been decidedly a country mouse with shy eyes and a hesitant, embarrassed smile that seemed to ask indulgence for her unsophistication. In a vague way she knew there were such things as lipsticks, vanishing creams, depilatories and nail polishes, but the nearest she had ever been to any of those vanities was when she passed them in some drugstore window. She was familiar with the works of Epictetus, Martial and Cervantes; but she had never heard of Steinbeck, Hemingway or Faulkner. She had never owned a pair of silk stockings, and the modistes of her native heath had striven with amazing success to

hide the gracious lines of her trim, small figure.

Now the cocoon had burst and the grub come forth a moth. A natural flair for layout and an uncanny sense in choosing type faces—perhaps a legacy from her father—had taken her from the typewriter desk to the copy department. She had a flat-topped glass-covered desk on which an office boy each morning put a bud vase with a single rose in it, and which bore a neatly lettered bronze sign, MISS JOHNSTONE. She had achieved a style, the definite New York look. A man could not have told just what her distinction was based on, but a woman would have known at once. She had that undefinable but femininely-understood quality called *chic*, which is something you either have or don't have, and about which no more can be done than about the color of your eyes. Dignified, entirely self-possessed she was, but far from prim and only unobtrusively religious. She smoked infrequent cigarettes when she felt so inclined, danced and danced exceedingly well, drank occasional whiskey-sodas or cocktails and carried them admirably.

The two thousand dollar dowry which had seemed "not so very much" the night she comforted her mother for their fortune's loss was still uncollected. Just a little less than fifteen hundred dollars was in the savings bank account earmarked for it, and no contributions had been made for almost three years. Her salary had been raised successively since she came to work for Winkleman, Robinson & Danzansky, but with each increase new demands came. The little typist might come to office in bargain basement or self-service store clothes, the junior executive had to look important as her position, or even a bit more so. Careful grooming was a requisite, and while the neighborhood beauty parlor could cut and wash and give a permanent to a feather bob or even a Veronica Lake coiffure nothing less than the ministrations of a expert in the best *salon de beauté* was acceptable for hair that reached to the bend of her knees when she stood and fell about her like a veil when she sat. She had to have a good address, and even in depression times two-room suites in the East Fifties commanded impressive rentals. But what difference did it make really? She was still in her early twenties. There was time and to spare to complete the fund, and meanwhile she was having the time of her life.

She met de Lacey Keogh in unpromising circumstances. Winkleman, Robinson & Danzensky had a new client. The client made lawnmowers and copy came through marked 24 point Broadway for heads and 14 point Garamond for body. Matilda took a look at the directions and shuddered. "Why not 72 point Caslon bold and 6 point Sans-serif?" she penciled on the margin of the copy sheet and called Mike Ginsberg, sixth assistant office boy and her more or less personal factotum. "Take this back to whoever sent it and tell him to study a style sheet for at least an hour," she ordered.

"Jeez, Mis' Johnstone," the freckle-faced youngster, usually brash as a Scottie pup, demurred, "I dassent. That's Mr. Keogh's copy, an' he'd just natchelly skin me alive if I tol' him anything like—"

"You tell that Mr. Keyhole exactly what I said," she cut in acidly. "I'll take full responsibility if he wants to make something of it. Even he ought to know Broadway and Garamond swear at each other."

Three minutes later by the office clock, or perhaps only two and a half, Mr. Keogh burst into her cubicle. "Did you send this?" he demanded, waving his copy with her insulting endorsement about as if he hoped to swat a hornet with it.

"I did," she answered tersely, looking up from the galley proofs she had been reading. Her cool hazel eyes met his hot brown ones, and for a moment nothing moved in either of their faces. Then the ghost of a

reluctant grin began to form on his lips. "Well, what's wrong with Broadway and Garamond?"

"Sit down Mr.—" Her eyes smiled. They had a trick of doing that while her lips were quite serious.

"Keogh," he supplied. "De Lacey Keogh."

"All right, de Lacey Keogh. Sit down and take a look at this style sheet."

Her sales talk was effective. She combined a knowledge of type faces to make a veteran printer jealous with a soothing manner which would have made the everlasting fortune of a physician. They compromised on Caslon bold for headlines and Bodoni for body. But before that consummation had been reached he had extended and she accepted an invitation to go to dinner at the Central Park Casino.

SINCE it is characteristic of New York and New Yorkers to be dissatisfied with things as they are, neither Matilda nor de Lacey was content to let their newfound friendship remain static.

He was a "Yankee from the South," a native of New Orleans to whom Harvard had imparted a high polish on which service with the Marines and two years postwar graduate work at the Sorbonne had laid an exceedingly hard finish. His crisply curling auburn hair and direct, intense tortoiseshell eyes were Celtic as Killarney's Lakes or Cuchillin or Fion na Gael, but the lean long jaw of him was pure Norman English. He was the first man Matilda ever had more than a passing interest in, the first of whom she'd ever asked herself, "How would it seem to be married to him?"

Strangely, she was the first girl he had wanted to have more of than an evening's casual company. There had been small time for women in his life. His family had been poor with that arrogant postbellum poverty of so many Southerners; he had worked for everything he had, and his lean face showed the effects of years of high ambition and slender resources. Now he was on the way up, and he loved the success he had won as an addict loves his drug or a miser his mounting stack of gold. Marriage was as remote from his mind as celibacy. Some day, perhaps, when he'd made his first hundred thousand—or half million. . . . Meantime, life was good and success sweet and women flowerlike decorations along the borders of the upward-leading path.

But the first morning they went riding in the Park he viewed the course he'd laid out for himself with something like misgiving. It was late August and light haze dimmed the buildings to the south while the fresh smell of newly-wet asphalt rose behind a lumbering sprinkler in Fifth Avenue. The sun's rays and the glowing green of the lawns coalesced in a picture fresh and bright as a new water-color and Matilda was part of it.

Smiling, frankly glad to see him, she looked younger and much smaller, almost childlike, in the breeches of white gabardine, white silk shirt left open at the throat and long boots of black kid that cased her narrow feet and slim straight legs. In place of belt she wore a scarf of orange silk twined three times round her waist; her long bright hair was turbaned in a square of scarlet silk bandanna.

He saw as much of her as their work would permit, and each succeeding meeting added to the doubts of the schedule he had set himself. Before he realized it she was in his blood like some unconquerable drug; the thought of her, the vision of her cleanly cut profile, her sometimes merry, sometimes serious hazel eyes swam between him and the copy on his desk. How could a man center his attention on motor cars or cigarettes or lawnmowers when he had a girl always in mind, when he was constantly remembering her in a backless, strapless evening gown dancing with him

on the Bossert Roof or at the Waldorf, or in printed crêpe and a pert small hat which might have graced a Watteau shepherdess smiling at him across the luncheon table? Or on the tennis court in shorts and halter, her glowing skin as vital as the sun that warmed it; or in a moulded lastex bathing suit diving like an otter and swimming like a seal, or running weightlessly as wind along the white sands of Jones Beach?

Transition from a egocentric to a girl-ocentric universe had come hard, but it was complete.

There was a sort of cool aloofness about her that baffled him. She took frank pleasure in his company, she never put him off when he asked her to see him, and when he called she met him with a smile and ready handclasp; she seemed regretful when they parted. But though she showed her liking for him openly she shrank from all but formal physical contact. She laid her hand in his at greeting, gave it to him when they said good-by, melted pliantly into his arms when dancing. That was all. When once or twice he took her hand impulsively as they walked she gently disengaged it, not reprovingly or prudishly, but with an unobtrusive definiteness that discouraged further demonstrations.

GLOWING summer burned itself to embers. Chestnut vendors replaced flower sellers at street corners, leaves came fluttering to the sidewalks or changed their greens for ardent reds and browns and yellows. Haze lay on the Westchester and Jersey hills and a hint of frost was in the air. They had been dining at the Fisheree at Coney Island, watching the kaleidoscope of the Broadwalk, seeing the tall ships drop down the bay and lose themselves in the blue mists of the broad ocean. Now they stood listening to the lisping gossip of the waves against the sand while silence lay across the purple, silver-dusted sky where a few stars had enmeshed themselves in the gauzy light like dewdrops in a cobweb. As yet there was no moon, but a pale radiance gleamed at the horizon and the silver of it lay upon the tangled skeins of wavelets creeping tiptoe up the quiet beach.

Matilda stifled a small sigh. "How beautiful, how lovely, it all is?" she murmured.

De Lacey laid his hand on hers where it rested on the iron railing of the Boardwalk. His voice did not break, but it came out of his throat breathlessly, almost inaudibly. "How beautiful—how lovely—you are! I love you, worship you, Matilda. Will you marry me?"

She turned to him, her face as pale as a carved ivory mask with mouth outlined in blood. Her eyes, tear-misted, pleading, came up to his. Her full lips, usually so mobile, hung limply parted, yearning, slack with longing almost past endurance. She swayed a little, like a young tree in a sudden wind.

He caught her in his arms. "Matilda! Matilda darling!"

But before his eager lips could find hers she had bowed her body backward, one hand pressed desperately against the rough tweed of his jacket, the other held across her mouth to shield it from his kiss. "No—*no!*" she implored. "Please, dearest one!"

He drew back mystified, a little hurt. "But, Matilda, you love me, don't you?"

"Love you?" Her lips moved stiffly, awkwardly, as though she drove them to pronounce the words by sheer will power. "Oh, yes—*yes!*" Her voice was weak, almost as tremulous as an old woman's. "But I mustn't let you kiss me, even touch me. I am an oblate, vowed and dedicated to religion. Earthly love is not for me. *Peccavi*—I have sinned. I have been guilty of inordinate affection. *O mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*"

He drew the story from her by degrees, heard how she had been brought up, how she had come to vow herself to a religious life. Soothingly and understandingly, as

one might with a frightened child, he reasoned with her. Her mother's strategem had been no more than a trick; a promise exacted so had no validity. How could she have renounced the world when she knew nothing of it, eschewing love when she had never had so much as a kiss from her mother?

By degrees she quieted. Vaguely, intuitively, she had felt these things were so, but not until he put the thought into words had she seen how her promise to renounce her birthright had been exacted from her rather than given freely. She was still sobbing, but there was something satisfied in her sobs, like the sobbing of a child who had received what she wants, but cannot stop for a moment. Her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves. There was about her the air of a bewildered little girl, or one who had come suddenly to brilliant sunlight from the darkness of a cave. "You —you think I'm not really bound by my vow? That I might in honor disregard it?" she faltered.

"There's only one vow that will bind you, dear. The one you take to forsake all others and keep only to me as long as we both shall live."

SHE was going to be married. The thought of it sang in her heart like a melody. When she walked down the Avenue it seemed that wedding bells were sounding joyously from the infinity of the bright sky; out of the canyon of Broadway when the wind blew between the tall buildings it seemed the echoes of a wedding march were sounding from a mighty organ; the pigeons strutting in the wintry sunshine of Rockefeller Plaza seemed to coo a prothalamium. She looked positively arrogant with happiness.

Arrangements were almost complete. She'd notified the landlord she was giving up the apartment; delicious hours had been spent in shopping for her trousseau and her bank account was almost wiped out—but what use was money now except to buy pretty things to make her husband love her all the more?

Only the dowry fund she kept intact. She would send it as a gift, a sort of votive offering, to the sisters at Mount Nazareth. They would put it to some good and pious use.

Cross-legged like a child she squatted on the Chinese rug as she sorted the papers from her files. Except for her sweet rondures of maturity she seemed a little girl, for her small body was arrayed in a checked gingham dirndl and a white old-fashioned-looking shirtwaist with little cap sleeves and a square neck edged with cotton lace. Her slender, almost adolescent-looking legs were bare and she wore moccasins on her unstockinged feet.

There was so little that she cared to save. Receipts from shops and milliners and hairdressers, paid bills for telephone and electric service, a note or two from men, picture postcards from vacationing office acquaintances. She tossed them into the waste basket, holding one here and there, but throwing away five for every one she kept.

Here was a note—the very first she'd received—from de Lacey. Here a card that had been on the flowers he'd sent her on her birthday, here— Her lower lip began to quiver. She caught it between her teeth to steady it.

It was a cheap half sheet of note paper, the sort that can be had at any ten-cent store, and the writing on it was bold, ill-formed, almost illegible, the writing of an educated Englishwoman. But she could read it! It's three words burned into her brain like molten silver, seared her new-found happiness away with ruthless cautery. "Remember your vow." Her mother's parting admonition. . . .

Like one who watches a screen in a darkened theater she saw the bleak, ill-furnished

dining-room, saw herself kneeling with clasped hands upon the Bible opened on a chair. The text on the page underneath her hands seemed glowing with a fiery light that burned her eyes. She closed her lids, pressed her fingers against them. Still the searing, branding letters scorched her eyes like the after-image of a flash of blinding light upon the retina. "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God thou shalt not slack to pay it. . . ."

The little breath-caught sobbing sigh that raised her eyes from the scrawled note was doubtlessly a woman's, but it had the sexlessness, the soul-wrung neuterness of a thing of absolute, unfathomable despair. It seemed to come from the half-shadows in the farther corner where the shaded lamplight did not quite reach, but when she looked she saw nothing. Or did she? The more she strained her glance the less certain she was.

She could not say it was a form with definition and outline, neither was it nothing more than a shadow slightly darker than the clustering gloom. Rather, it was one of those amorphous, flickering, illusive things we sometimes have a momentary sense of seeing when we are alone in an empty house—the flicker of a stealthy, silent shape that vanishes around a corner in the hallway, the outline of a head withdrawn around the angle of a door or window before we have a chance to make sure we have really seen it—one of those things our reason tells us is not there, but which our nerves and senses proclaim past all possibility of denial.

"Who—who's there?" she challenged, her voice so low that she herself could scarcely hear it.

The lamplit room was still as a church whose worshipers have departed. Not even muted murmurs of the outside traffic filtered in.

She held her breath to catch the whisper of a reply. The tiny, almost soundless ticking of her wrist-watch and the little gilt-and-crystal clock that stood upon her dressing table in the farther room beat contrapuntally against each other in a sort of fugue, then once again the small, sad, sobbing sound was there, though if she heard it with her outward ear or if she heard it only with the ear of the spirit she could not say.

SHE got to her feet, began walking. Back and forth across the rug she plodded, ten steps forward, eight steps to the left, ten steps back. She kicked her buckskin moccasins aside, trod her weary Via Dolorosa barefoot. And as she walked, as though they beat a muffled death march for her happiness, she heard the sorrowful, reproachful sobs, and when she tried to face the visitant it seemed to melt into the shadows, yet as she turned her head away she caught the momentary outline of its presence in the corner of her eye.

Her head jerked back. Her delicate, slim nostrils flared and widened like the nostrils of some frightened forest creature drawing warning from the breeze. Lavender! The scent was faint, so faintly fragile she could hardly catch it, but delicate and elusive as it was, there was no denying it. Lavender. Her mother's sole indulgence in feminine vanity, the only scent that she had known in childhood. She never used it. She couldn't. It was too fraught with somber memories. Her lingerie was laid away in sachets faintly spiced with Jicky. After her shower she used Revillon's *Latitude Cinquante*, yet there the simple English-countryside perfume was. Every moment, every faltering, weary-footed step she took, it grew stronger.

"No—*no!*" she pleaded as she turned to face the presence lurking in the shadows. "It wasn't fair! You tricked me—trapped me—lured me into vowing my birthright away before I knew what life meant! You shan't do this to me! I can't—I won't—"

But there was nothing there to argue with when she turned squarely on the nebulous visitant, yet as she turned away again in heartsick weariness she caught the flickering impression of a shadow-form that veiled itself in shadows. And the scent of lavender grew stronger . . . stronger.

"I won't—I won't!" she kept repeating doggedly to herself—or was it to the rather-sensed-than-seen other who stood just out of reach of sight and spoke no word and made no move, just waited? Waited . . . for what? For how long? She had an oddly unsubstantial feeling, as though she walked upon a cloud instead of solid floor, as though nothing underneath or around her were quite real. Her thoughts were whirling giddily, like shadows cast by a weaver's shuttle. How long was eternity? Infinity must be filled with just such shadow-forms as this, bodiless and substanceless outcasts; the sinful, the selfish, the forsworn. . . . The forsworn—those who broke their plighted troth! . . . "When thou shalt vow a vow . . . the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee."

And with the memory of the Scriptural text there came another, the dim, wiped-over recollection of a line by James Whitcomb Riley:

So vowed I. It is written. It is changeless as the past.

"Changeless as the past!" Morning came and through the windows the bright winter sunshine poured like water. She had walked almost twenty miles since she had come upon her mother's farewell note, but with the coming of the day she reached her goal. It was futile to attempt to dodge Destiny as to try to hold the sun back in its course, she realized. Destiny, the invisible, infallible nuncio of God, had spoken.

She dressed carefully, choosing a shabby old three-piece tweed suit, a pair of well-worn tan brogues and a pointed old felt hat with a rather somber pheasant's feather. She didn't need to make herself attractive, but she needed desperately to save everything that had merchantable value. Then she called the antique dealer and the second-hand man.

THE Chinese rug and Sheraton table and the old Victorian Sheffield brought just under three hundred dollars. The second-hand man swore he robbed his wife and seven starving children when he made the offer, but for her trousseau and the bedroom furniture and the silver-mounted crystal toilet things, together with all her linen and odd furnishings, he gave her two hundred dollars. With the few bills and odd change in her purse that would just stretch the dowry fund in bank to the required two thousand and leave her bus fare to Mount Nazareth. Nothing for breakfast or luncheon. (*Dear God, the old Eve dies hard in me, thinking of cinnamon toast and coffee at a time like this!*)

"Will you wait a moment, please?" she asked the truckman who had called for the furniture. "I'd like to write a note before you take the desk."

First a line to Mr. Winkleman apologizing for her abrupt resignation, "but circumstances beyond my control"—*how utterly, fantastically true that is!*—"compel me to leave the city permanently and at once."

Then her valedictory to de Lacey:

"My darling, more to me than this world or the next, it must, it has to be good-by. There is no way I can avoid it, no other way, dearest. It's Destiny, Fate, the Will of God, whatever we may choose to call it, but it's greater, stronger than we are.

"I know what you would say if you were here, how you would reason with

me, but this is something stronger than cold reason. Were I to listen to my heart I'd not be writing this, heart's dearest, but even love is powerless before the awful compulsion of a vow, and I am vowed and dedicated, dear. Long, long ago I took a vow upon my knees to do this thing, and I cannot—*dare* not—slack to pay it.

"Oh, dearest one, why did I have to meet you before they had me safely in the sisterhood? I might have been happy that way, for you can't miss the sunshine if you've always been blind, but—"

TEARS stung her eyes until she could not see to form the letters, or even see the page before her. She clamped her teeth into her quivering lower lip and finished, writing by pure instinct:

"You'll understand, dear, when I tell you that my honor is involved in this, and 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honor more.'

"Good-by, my dear, dear love. Always and forever, God bless and keep you.

"Matilda."

"Wilt thou vow holy poverty unto the Lord?" the cracked treble of the old chaplain came to her as from a great distance.

She caught her breath, then: "I will," she answered steadily.

"Wilt thou vow chastity, obedience . . . putting behind thee all earthly affections . . . forgetting . . ."

Forgetting? Could see forget their walks through the Park in the sweet soft dusk, or up Fifth Avenue while the street lamps glowed like a necklace of opals against the velvet background of the lilac shadows and the great stone lions drowsed like benign pussy-cats on the steps of the Library? Or the gift of the flask of vodka shaped like a dancing bear from the proprietor of the little Russian restaurant in East Thirteenth Street who mistook them for bride and groom and made his offering with a grinned wish for their happiness and numerous progeny? Lily Pons as Lakmé at the Metropolitan . . . the Easter pageant at Radio City . . . that snow-swept afternoon at the Polo Grounds when they huddled close together in a rug and watched Army fight Notre Dame to a scoreless tie? Or (*be pitiful, kind God!*) *the* moon-washed night at Coney Island when he told her that he loved her?

"I will," she responded clearly.

A little sigh, freighted more with weariness than regret, slipped past her lightly parted lips.

The silver wedding ring had been slipped on the third finger of her right hand, the bridesmaid with the shears had handed them to Father Pancoast. She bent her head still lower as the steel snicked through the long strands of her hair. The wimple had been adjusted, the long veil of black bunting presented for her kiss, then draped upon her head, pinned in place— "Matilda, thou art as dead. Rise, Sister Mary Bernadine."

The eyes she raised in adoration to the flower-decked altar seemed dark and shadowed in a face almost as whitely colorless as the wimple of white linen that framed it, but there was no tragedy in them, no hot tears of renunciation. They were calm and soft and steady, like the eyes of a Madonna, the eyes of one who has been vouchsafed a glimpse of Paradise. This was that for which she had been destined since her birth, since her conception. All else was transitory and illusory. Already the past began to seem dim and unreal as the measures of a half-forgotten song. All that had gone before was really meaningless to her now. She could just open her hands and let it go.

She loosened her clasped fingers, let them fall apart slackly. . . .

No Light for Uncle Henry

By AUGUST DERLETH

EDWARD STODEN was a prosaic young man who led a prosaic life —the kind of man to whom nothing ever happens, and that is as it should be, as Edward would have elected to have it. Everything in its proper place.

Unfortunately, something very definitely untoward happened to Edward. And,

Come to the house with a darkened room guarded by the sinister shadow of a dead man

ironically, it was his doing. Circumstances alter places, persons, events. Circumstances first. Edward lost his job, and hunted for a long time for another—so long, in fact, that he had to give up his room and move into the old place with his Uncle Herbert, of whom he was not fond. Uncle Herbert Stoden lived in a medium-sized town in the Midwest, one of hundreds of towns like it, with shaded streets and picket fences, with houses that were on the one hand relics of the 1880's most rococco style, and on the other, reminiscent of the most recent work of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Here, in Weston, he settled down to a quiet life, having found a job to his liking. Eight hours. This allowed him time to putter around. It was puttering around that got him into trouble.

Living with Uncle Herbert was not too trying. The old man had some queer ideas, but they did not interrupt the flow of Edward's life. Unfortunately, the prosaic man is always prone to be troubled by the outré; if Uncle Herbert had not been so insistent about the room at the end of the upper hall, Edward might have gone to his grave in untroubled monotony. However, the old man barked out his strange request almost at once upon Edward's appearance—that the room at the end of the corridor was usually kept closed, not locked, the light fixtures had been taken out, and in no circumstances was Edward to carry any kind of light into the room. Uncle Henry, he explained, had always detested light; "The dark is for sleeping," he had said; and now, out of deference to him, less than a year dead, no light was to be turned up in his room.

Uncle Herbert's request was enough to tickle Edward's curiosity. He could not remember that Uncle Henry had been addled or queer, but took the older man's story in good faith. Nevertheless, he could not get it out of his mind; he tried to imagine Uncle Henry disliking the light, and it was difficult. While he puttered around in the garden, he turned the idea of Uncle Henry's aversion to light over and over in his mind. For a prosaic man like Edward, whose mild blue eyes, thin-lipped mouth, and pale cheeks which emphasized his touseled dark hair, such a curiosity as his dead uncle's avoidance of light was a novelty upon which he could chew for a long, long time.

So he did. Through rows of beans, radishes, and even the dahlias. He had been in the garden every evening for a month before it occurred to him that he worked for part of the time at least below the window, of what had been Uncle Henry's room. And, thinking this, he looked up to the window, more than half expecting it to be shaded. But it was not. Moreover, he had the distinct impression that someone was watching him from the window, or at least that someone was in the room.

Being a direct and simple man, Edward went into the house at once and was half way up the stairs before he realized that he had passed Uncle Herbert on the porch, the cook and housekeeper were at the movies, and there was no one who could have been in the room. Nevertheless, he went on up, opened the door cautiously, and looked in.

IT WAS empty—devoid of everything. After devouring the faded curtain left on the window, even a church-mouse would have starved in the room. Edward could not believe the indisputable evidence of his eyes. Without thinking, he took out a penny folder of matches and lit one. He looked around. Nothing. He had seen quite correctly. He nodded, satisfied, and stepped out of the room.

But he had hardly passed the threshold before he was reminded that he *had* seen something more by the flickering light of the match. What was it? His shadow

on the wall? Yes, that was it. He closed the door, and turned toward the stairs. At the head of the stairs he stopped, possessed by such a curious notion that he could not for the moment grasp it.

If he had been standing, looking into the room, shielding the match held before him with a cupped hand so that it would not glare into his eyes, *how could he have seen his shadow on the opposite wall?*

That was where it had been!

He looked back at the closed door as if he expected something to come out of the room. He went down a few steps, hesitated, came back. It was exceedingly disturbing for a man of Edward's stamp to experience any departure from the norm; either he had had an hallucination or he had not; he would not rest until he knew. He went hesitatingly back to the door. The dusk had not yet advanced so far that he could not see everything about him with recognizable clarity. He opened the door.

Inside the room nothing had changed.

There was nothing on the walls. He looked very carefully, especially across the room. Then, very methodically, he took out a match and lit it—and there was the shadow, dark, immovable.

How could he have mistaken it for his own? It was that of a gross, fat man with a double chin and straggling hair, made as if by someone sitting in a chair. Despite the prickling of his scalp, Edward stood resolutely looking at it, waiting for it to move. For a moment nothing whatever happened. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, the shadow began to fade, and soon it was gone.

The match burned down to his fingers, and Edward dropped it. He backed out of the room, shaken now, and went thoughtfully down the steps. Accepting the appearance of the shadow on the wall as something more than an hallucination, there was yet something disturbingly familiar about it. He had the uneasy conviction that he had seen that outline in flesh somewhere. At the foot of the stairs it came to him.

Of course! Henry's room! It was the shadow of Uncle Henry!

He went out on the porch, where his Uncle Herbert sat, and would have gone on into the garden to put away his tools for the night had not the old man stopped him, with his gruff voice.

"What were you doing upstairs?"

"Why—nothing. I just went up to see whether I brought home something I needed from the office."

"Oh." There was a manifest edge of suspicion about the old man's voice. "You didn't go near Henry's room?"

"There's nothing of mine there."

Herbert grunted and was still; it was impossible to ascertain the expression of his eyes in the growing darkness. Edward sat down on the steps to the walk, his mind in turmoil. Whatever had possessed him to lie about going upstairs? Something had prompted him, almost like a voice in his ear, some vehement urging he could not deny, something, he felt sure, alien to him.

After a few moments of silence there, of collecting his thoughts, he went and put away his garden tools.

That night Edward dreamed of his Uncle Henry.

IT WAS a particularly curious dream, so realistic that Edward almost imagined his dead uncle was in the room with him when he awakened. He dreamed that the shadow on the wall came through the laths and plaster into his own room, and then, having made itself visible there, gravely stepped out of the wall and materialized into a very tangible likeness of Uncle Henry. He came over and sat down on the side of the bed, gazing pensively and a little sadly at Edward. In his dream, Edward asked what he wanted. "You

never were a very bright boy, Edward," his uncle seemed to say; "so I'll not explain. There's something I want you to do for me. It may seem a little odd, but I want it done just the same." Uncle Henry's dream-request was odd, certainly; he wanted his brother Herbert brought up to his room some night. Herbert would not enter the room ordinarily, by day or dark; so perhaps Edward would have to get him a little drunk and lead him to it as if by mistake. So saying, Uncle Henry faded away, and Edward awoke.

It was preposterous, of course. If it had not been, Edward would not have thought of it all day. Nor would he have dreamed the same thing a few nights later. Uncle Henry had always been tenacious—even in someone else's dreams apparently. He occupied Edward's nights with fair steadiness thereafter, always in the same dream, until toward the end, when he began to get very impatient with Edward, calling him a dunce and a dolt, and saying he would never have made his will the way he had done, if he had known how stubborn and moral Edward could be. Now, with Edward's permission, he would have to take care of Herbert himself.

Just what this meant, Edward did not know. Also, he was at a loss to understand that strange reference to Uncle Henry's will, since his money had gone to Herbert. But, of course, a dream was a dream, and one was not supposed to make sense out of dreams.

That day Edward did not feel right. It was not that he was ill; he simply felt unlike himself. He found himself wanting to do irrational things, and by mid-afternoon he began to do them. He bought himself a mystery novel to read, he who never read them. He took a firm line with his boss, which was extraordinary. In short he manifested a masterfulness which he had never previously possessed. The entire staff was pleasantly stunned. Finally, when he went home that evening, he actually bought a quart of Scotch, which was revolutionary. Edward had been brought up with scruples, he was a temperance man, but fortunately for his self-respect, he was no Prohibitionist and no teetotaler.

"Scotch!" exclaimed Uncle Herbert, licking his chops. "Have you got the chills, Edward?"

Edward heard himself explaining that he had brought the Scotch chiefly for Uncle Herbert, saying that things had been very prosaic in the old house, and the two of them ought to liven things up a little. He had a faint twinge of conscience, saying this, a little incredulous, too, at the sound of his voice saying those words. But Uncle Herbert, after only one fleetingly amazed glance at him, reacted very favorably to the suggestion.

The evening was memorable, beyond question.

After two shots Uncle Herbert became patronizing and loquacious. He apologized to Edward for underrating him. "Always thought you were a little prig, Edward. Your father was pretty stiff, you know. Hard to stand. Couldn't have him around. Henry was always too tolerant."

Edward insisted that he need not apologize; he knew how it was. With befuddled amazement, he heard himself admit that he had certainly been a horrible prig, and asked his uncle to forgive him! He had not yet consumed enough Scotch to be unaware of the nature of his words, or of astonishment that his tongue should be playing such unbelievable tricks on him. Even if he were a prig, he would never in his right mind admit it.

But the evening did not end when the Scotch had been consumed. With a recklessness not entirely like him, Uncle Herbert brought out a bottle of wine so old that it tasted more like alcohol than wine, and they proceeded to polish that off as

if it were water. By the time the effects of this orgy became obvious, Uncle Herbert was ready for anything; but, oddly, Edward, for all his befuddlement, seemed to become suddenly purposeful and intent.

"No, it's time to go to bed, Uncle," he said. "We'll do this again some other night."

Uncle Herbert agreed readily, possibly because he had not fully understood. He was in an agreeable mood, and would have given his assent to anything.

EDWARD led him over the stairs, both of them stumbling a great deal. He reached out his hand to put on the light, but somehow, he could not press the button; he had the conviction that something was preventing him from doing so. He gave up and went on without the benefit of the light.

Halfway up the stairs Uncle Herbert asked about the light, with some alarm manifest in his voice.

"It's burned out," said Edward without blinking an eye.

"Be careful, now," said Uncle Herbert. "My own room. Not Henry's. I couldn't face him—" He began to laugh, his laughter clearer than his slurred words. "It's a good one on you, Edward!"

"What?"

"That's a secret—just Henry's and mine!" He shook his head. "The damn' fool hid it. I took apart every stick he owned; couldn't find it. But it's no matter. It'll come out the same."

It was difficult for Edward to follow Uncle Herbert; so he made no attempt to do so. He did not know what the old man was talking about; so his endeavors to listen were not great. Moreover, he had a strange, insistent belief that he would know very soon.

He propelled his uncle directly to the door of the closed room, and unceremoniously pushed him over the threshold. At the same instant he had the sensation of something going out of him; he felt limp, weak, unaccountably unable to keep to his feet. He put out a hand and groped along the wall to the door of his own room, and, going in, fell across the bed in a drunken stupor.

He was too far gone to hear Uncle Herbert's terrified scream, and the strange way in which it was muffled.

In the morning Edward had a hangover. The housekeeper had come in and got breakfast, but she was put out because the old man had not yet come down.

"Sleeps a long time today," she said. "But no wonder. The two of you must have had quite a time of it." She looked at him archly.

"Mrs. Wilson, I always know when I've had enough," he said stiffly.

"Those bloodshot eyes you're wearing this morning don't say so, dearie," she retorted, grinning.

He had already observed the appearance of his eyes; so Mrs. Wilson's was a telling blow. What had actually happened last night. He found his memory strangely hazy.

Meanwhile, there was breakfast looking him in the face, and he had no idea that mere food could look so venomous. He left the table hurriedly and, taking his hat and brief-case, went out of the house, saying to the indignant Mrs. Wilson that he would just get himself "some soda."

He put in a very trying morning at the office.

The morning, however, was nothing compared to the afternoon.

When he got back from lunch he found the District Attorney and the Sheriff of the county waiting for him. He was informed in the barest minimum of words that his Uncle Herbert had been found dead in an empty room of his house, presumably after a night of drinking with Edward, and what did Edward have to say

about it? The old man had apparently been smothered.

It was a nasty business for Edward.

Uncle Herbert had been found almost wrapped in the window-shade. Moreover, at the very top of the shade, affixed to the shade so that it would always be rolled up out of sight even when the curtain was drawn, there was discovered a holograph will signed by his Uncle Henry, in which all his wealth had been willed to Edward. Uncle Herbert had also willed his wealth to Edward. There was motive in plenty. What matter it that the original will as filed had given everything to Herbert?

Poor Edward was given several degrees of investigation and made a miserable showing. Indeed, by the time the investigators got through telling him what he had done insofar as they had been able to follow his movements yesterday, he was almost convinced that he had killed his Uncle Herbert in a drunken stupor. He was shaken badly, with visions of doom closing in on him.

What had happened?

Edward actually spent four days in jail. The humiliation of it was almost unbearable. Day after day he heard all about the evidence of struggle, the reasons he had for killing Uncle Herbert—the concealed will, the probated will now proved false, Herbert's will. Greed!

It was the codicil to the concealed will which freed him finally. Not a codicil so much as a note. They showed it to him, and were so pleasant to him that he was utterly bewildered. "I am beginning to suspect that Herb is poisoning me. Symptoms suggest it."

HE READ the sentence in his dead Uncle Henry's shaky hand, he read it several times, and gradually, before his mind's eye, the picture took place. Uncle Herbert, having at some time or other since Henry's death, seen the shadow on the wall, had invented that story about no light in Henry's room as an idiosyncrasy of Henry's, solely so that no one else would see the shadow on the wall. As to what had happened that night—?

"We believe that your uncle blundered into the room into which you put him by mistake, and tangled with the window shade. He could have wrapped himself up like that."

Edward did not believe it. He had the feeling that they didn't either. But there was nothing else to believe. There had been only the two of them in that house that night—Uncle Herbert and he—and the dark, grotesque shadow on the wall.

"You're free to go," they told him.

He wanted to ask how it was possible for a dream to force a man to do things alien to his nature; he did not understand possession of the physical body by the astral or spiritual of another, particularly a dead man. But he still had enough sense to realize that the District Attorney and the Sheriff would probably be the last persons on earth to give him the explanation he wanted. Instead, he asked tentatively, about what they had done in regard to the note on the concealed will.

"Exhumation," said the District Attorney.

Edward was shocked.

"Oh," said he. Somehow he felt no desire to know what they had discovered; instinctively, he already knew. But they told him nevertheless.

"Filled with arsenic," said the Sheriff. "So Herbert was slated to be fried anyway if he hadn't been smothered."

He was released in the evening, and he hurried to the old Stoden house, urgent with purpose. He went directly to Uncle Henry's room, stepping across the threshold, lit a match with some trepidation. He looked at the wall.

There was nothing there at all.

THE SHAPE OF THRILLS TO COME

THE MAN WHO AMAZED FISH

SOME whispered that the ancient Chinese doctor was a hundred and fifty years old . . . no match for the Jap invaders of Hangchow.

But the officer of the Emperor explained that he was here in the Drug Shop only to bargain with the learned doctor. He would give rice for the small vermilion pills that would make his men invincible.

The invaders did not know that the ancient one had vowed that this district should be Chinese soil forever, no matter how many Japanese should storm the land!

By FRANK OWEN

WHAT was the macabre secret of the fenced-in wilderness, the armed guards and the great iron gate, always locked to those who wanted to get in—or out? These men who shot to kill, who were they and what devil-master did they serve?

JOHN CAWDER'S WIFE
By P. Schuyler Miller

✠

A WIG FOR MISS DEVORE
By August Derleth

✠

COULD there be a connection between a Hollywood glamor girl, the auburn wig of a Soho murderess, and the sacrificial tool of Aztec priests—used to cut out the living hearts of their victims?

Incredible — —
Horror-Filled — —

WEIRD TALES FOR MAY

On Sale March First

The Book and the Beast

By ROBERT ARTHUR

Beware of old books. You may find attractive recipes and conjurations . . . tantalizing headings. But take heed if you come upon a warning such as this—

> ● *"Ope' not this book*
> *'Twixt dusk and dawn*
> *Lest you let loose*
> *The Devil's spawn."*

WALDO MURCHISON found the book in the most prosaic of places—a second-hand shop. Not even a good second-hand shop. Just a dingy hole in the wall on Canal Street, east of Broadway, a region as commonplace as Manhattan has to offer.

It was a shop devoted chiefly to second-hand luggage and old clothes of the most depressing appearance. Waldo Murchison entered it in the first place only because a high wind had blown away his hat, whisking it in a series of eccentric leaps out of sight into a darkish alley well provided with noisome puddles.

Mr. Murchison watched the hat vanish without undue emotion. He was accustomed to losing things. His hats blew away, he left his umbrellas on trains and in subways, and his glasses frequently dropped and broke. He was a smallish man, going bald, with an eager glitter in his eye that denoted the passionate hobbyist—which he was. His specialty was the collection of books and manuscripts devoted to the occult.

It was to stave off a cold in the head rather than because he cared how he looked that Mr. Murchison turned into the little second-hand store. There were some caps in the window, and he intended to buy one. A cap would keep his denuded skull warm, be cheap, and wouldn't blow off. Mr. Murchison was not an impractical man, for all his eager absorption in his hobby.

It was very easy to buy a cap. The only difficulty was to avoid buying half the contents of the store. If Waldo Murchison had been a fraction more suggestible, or the small, voluble Levantine proprietor a trifle more persuasive, he might have indeed done so. Mr. Murchison, however, was firm enough to avoid this sorry consequence of his slight mishap, but he could not very well refuse the proprietor's last impassioned plea, which was that he at least look around to see if there positively wasn't anything else he could use.

Mr. Murchison let his glance run swiftly over the shelves, counters, and racks—and then, as if some magnetic quality in the volume had drawn his eyes to it, he saw the book on a low shelf, gathering dust.

The volume was not thick, but in height and breadth about the shape of an old-fashioned ledger. It was bound in leather, of an unusual purplish-black color and a fine, unfamiliar texture. There was no title or inscription. There was, however—and Waldo Murchison's small, gray mustache quivered with interest—an inch-wide iron strap running completely about the book, keeping it not only shut but locked. For a small, rusty iron padlock of antique design was hooked through a hasp where the ends of the iron strap overlapped.

With a murmur indicating an interest

The whole thing was written in a hash of Latin, French and Italian. . . .

so slight as to be almost non-existent, and a gesture so casual that a word might have stopped it—Mr. Murchison was an adept in the art of acquiring his items at the lowest possible quotations—he reached for the book, brought it forth, and blew a fine film of dust from it.

"Hmm," Waldo Murchison commented, in a non-committal manner, and turning a lackluster eye upon the proprietor, shook the book slightly. "What is it?" he sighed.

It was, he gathered from the instant reply, a volume of the utmost rarity, the personal diary of a European nobleman of note, an intimate friend of Napoleon's. It had been found in a suitcase bought by the proprietor himself at a sale of unclaimed luggage from the various hotels. It had belonged to a European gentleman who had been so crass as to run out on his hotel bill—at least, he had vanished from his room and never been seen again—and so had come into the proprietor's possession with the utmost legality. He was holding it for a collector who had offered him a hundred dollars for it, but if Mr. Murchison cared to make a better offer—

Waldo Murchison sighed, and yawned politely, restraining the itch that quivered in every fiber of him to see what lay behind that suggestively locked iron strap.

"If it's worth so much," he inquired, raising one eyebrow, "why did the owner have to beat his hotel bill? Why didn't he just sell the book?"

Then, not waiting for an answer, he fumbled at the small padlock. It proved to be not locked—the proprietor had picked it. Mr. Murchison swung back the cover, the iron hinge at the back moving with some difficulty, and as his eye fell upon the first page his heart pounded so with excitement that it was with the greatest effort he kept his hands steady.

The book was not a printed volume. It was handwritten in ink, with flowing grandiloquent letters so ornate as to be almost unreadable, upon ruled pages. The writing seemed to be a mixture of bad French and Italian, with some Latin thrown in for good measure.

It was not a diary at all, though the fact of its being handwritten might have misled an ignorant purchaser.

At the top of the page, in the bold, flowing script was written in Italian: *Recipes and Conjurations.* And beneath that a few lines of verse which Mr. Murchison, because of their multilingual complexity, was not able to puzzle out. Beneath the verse was the single capital letter: *C.*

Waldo Murchison's pulse was hammering as he flipped rapidly through the pages of the volume. He dared not inspect it more closely, lest he reveal his interest. But his gratified eye made out, at the top of several of the pages, such tantalizing headings as *To Be Invisible,* and *To Bring Three Beautiful Females to Your Room After Dark.*

There were others, equally promising, but his scholarship was not great enough to untangle the lingual mixture of their wording in such a brief space. He did, however, pause to study with gleaming eyes the picture which some hand had inset into the exact center of the book.

The picture had been painted by no unskilled artist upon the finest of parchment. The parchment was a trifle yellowed, but the brilliant colors of the small, hungry-looking dragon upon it were undimmed.

It was quite a repulsive little creature, squatting upon a flagstoned floor, and staring out from the page with bright yellow eyes. At a slight distance behind the dragon the unknown artist had added a touch of artistic detail by putting in a cluttered heap of bones. Mr. Murchison did not try to make out more.

He closed the volume, yawned again, and shook his head.

"You lied to me," he accused the proprietor, looking him in the eye. "This isn't a diary at all. It's just a lot of nonsense. It's either an old copybook that some child did compositions in, or something similar. The picture's obviously a child's drawing. The whole thing isn't worth a dollar, except for the binding and clasp. If this was a real book, I might buy it, but just to put in my library as a curiosity. Even then I wouldn't give more than ten dollars for it."

He shrugged and started to put the book back. The proprietor brought forth a hasty torrent of words. Ultimately Mr. Murchison allowed himself to be persuaded. Having set his own price, he was eventually talked out of ten dollars. Presently, shaking so with suppressed eagerness he could hardly hold the paper-wrapped book in his hands, he emerged from the shop, took one quick gulp of fresh air, and dived into a taxi to be taken to Pennsylvania Station, and thence to Bayside, Long Island, where he lived comfortably in a small house close to the water, tended by an aged couple.

Arriving home, Waldo Murchison popped directly into his study, and there, with trembling fingers, unwrapped his treasure. He leafed through it, at first quickly, then giving close attention to some of the pages. He spent perhaps an hour in this preliminary survey, and after that, because he simply had to tell someone of his find, he took enough time out to dash off a quick letter to his nearest crony, one McKenzie Muir, whose residence was in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn.

It is (wrote Waldo Murchison) a handwritten volume of recipes and conjurations dating at least to the early 18th century. It is bound in, I am positive, human skin; a Senegambian's, I would wager. An iron band constitutes part of the binding, and this locks with an iron padlock. Within, upon the first page, is a bit of doggerel verse which I have finally translated as

> Ope' not this book
> 'Twixt dusk and dawn
> Lest you let loose
> The devil's spawn.

Beneath that is the single letter, an ornate capital C.

The warning I take to be intended to scare off unauthorized persons who might wish to make use of the volume. For—I have no proof, but hope to discover some—I am convinced that this was Cagliostro's own personal volume of magical charms and conjurations!

The whole thing is written in a hash of Latin, French, and Italian. This I take to have been an additional precaution against unauthorized use, since only a very well-educated person could possibly have read it. It will take considerable digging to make the necessary translations, but I have already partially deciphered two of the conjurations. One is simply called, "To Be Invisible." The other, "To Bring Three Beautiful Females to Your Room After Dark."

If the ingredients were available, I would most certainly try the charms out! But one of the necessary articles for the first, for instance, is fat tried from the hand of a man hanged upon a gibbet. This imposes some difficulty in using the recipes! But I have no doubt I will find others which are simpler and then I shall positively experiment to discover their efficacy.

The most noteworthy item in the volume, though, is an inset parchment containing the brilliantly colored picture of a dragon. The monster has green scales, long blue claws, blue fangs in a crimson mouth, a scarlet tail, and scarlet filaments or antennae dangling from its head and spine like seaweed. Its eyes are bright yellow shot through with scarlet, and gleam from its head with an almost living brilliance.

The dragon seems to be squatting upon a

tiled floor of stone, looking directly at you, jaws slightly agape, and a ravenous expression plain upon its features. Its scaled flanks are lean nd sunken. Its bones show through everywhere. A leaner, hungrier, more sinister monster I have never seen pictured. I have, accordingly, decided to nickname it Cassius.

Behind the dragon, partially obscured, is a pile of bones—a pleasantly gruesome touch. For they are human bones. I have examined the picture through the glass, and there are visible thirteen human skulls, so skillfully done by the artist that under magnification every detail of them is accurate even to the discoloration showing some to be older than the others. Mingled with them are a mass of other bones and shreds of cloth; the whole is startling and almost upsetting in its vivid accuracy.

More than this I cannot tell you now. I have only had a few minutes in which to examine my find. Mrs. Studley is calling me for dinner, and I shall resume my examination after I have eaten.

You must come over and see it—today (as you get this) if possible. Please bring your collection of Cagliostro's letters—a handwriting comparison will tell us instantly whether this volume was indited by him or not. Don't try to buy it from me, though. Perhaps I'll leave it to you in my will, but you will never get it away from me sooner!

Cordially,
WALDO MURCHISON

Mr. Waldo Murchison then sealed the letter, stamped and addressed it, and upon going downstairs to dinner gave it to Mrs. Studley to mail later. He ate rapidly, gulping down a really excellent meal, as Mrs. Studley testified later, and then dashed back to his study to resume his perusal of his odd volume.

When the Studley's, having cleaned up the dinner dishes, left for their own home, where they lived with their married daughter, several blocks distant, he was so engrossed he did not even respond to their good nights—a fact which somehow greatly upset buxom Mrs. Studley the next day.

For when, the next morning, she sent Studley up to call Mr. Murchison to breakfast, Waldo Murchison was not to be found. He was not in his bedroom. He was not in his study. He was nowhere in the house. He was simply gone.

WHEN the police arrived, they made slight headway in fathoming the mystery of Waldo Murchison's disappearance. He was just gone, with nothing to show for his going save a slight disturbance of his study. Some books had been knocked off his desk, as if swept off by a careless arm, and Mr. Murchison's glasses had fallen to the floor and broken.

Beyond this there was no trace of him. The disturbance was not enough to suggest a fight, and Waldo Murchison was not wealthy enough to warrant his having been kidnaped. The police finally decided, understandably, that Mr. Murchison had either deliberately vanished for reasons of his own, or wandered off in an amnesic state.

Neither of these suggestions could be improved upon by Mr. McKenzie Muir, who arrived during the latter part of the afternoon.

Mr. Muir, a lanky Scotsman, it must be confessed was not so much interested in ascertaining the whereabouts of Waldo Murchison as he was in that of the volume Murchison had written him about. Quickly learning the facts, he did not think it necessary to show the police Waldo Murchison's note to him; nor, in fact, to mention then the handwritten volume which they found opened upon Mr. Murchison's desk, gave a casual scrutiny to, and put aside.

Muir favored the amnesia theory himself, and had small doubt that Murchison would reappear shortly. Before he did,

Mr. Muir intended to see that the volume Waldo Murchison had stumbled upon was in his possession—and possession he interpreted as nine points of the law.

Accordingly, awaiting a favorable opportunity, he opened the purple-leather-bound book and quickly slapped upon the inside cover one of his own bookmarks, a supply of which he carried in his wallet. Then, having given the mucilage time to dry, he took the book to the lieutenant in charge of the case, convincingly explained that his chief reason for calling that day had been to get back the volume, borrowed from him by Murchison, showed the bookmark, and was presently allowed to depart with it.

HE LEFT, filled with the exultation of the collector, which knows no scruples or morals, and returned by bus and subway to his home—a trip of several hours, so that it was after dark when he arrived. In studying the volume on the way, all thought of Waldo Murchison passed from his mind.

Arrived at his own residence, however, Mr. Muir was forced for a time to abandon his examination of his newly acquired treasure. First he had to eat the dinner that had been kept waiting for him. Then it was necessary to dismiss his butler—Mr. Muir lived on a somewhat better scale than had Waldo Murchison—and prepare for the arrival of a caller. For although he was a hobbyist, he did not confine himself to a single hobby. He liked old books. He also liked young blondes.

With the arrival of the blonde, who was not only young but exceptionally luscious as well, Mr. Muir found it extremely easy not only to forget Waldo Murchison but his book too. It did not return to his mind, indeed, until some time later, as he was on the point of retiring. Then, seeing the volume on his desk, he picked it up for one more look and found himself fascinated again, as Waldo Murchison had been, by the repulsive little dragon.

After a moment he reached for a glass to study it more carefully. And doing so, he snorted, for he perceived that Murchison had been guilty of an inaccuracy. A distinct inaccuracy in describing the beast.

" 'Lean and hungry'!" he sniffed aloud. " 'Bones showing through everywhere.' Gross overstatement. The beastie is not fat, to be sure, but his bones don't show through. And though one might say his expression was hungry, I'd not call it ravenous. There's even a bit of bulge to the belly, which is not an indication of starvation. And—" Muir peered more closely through the glass — "there are fourteen skulls, not thirteen, in the heap behind the beastie. Ha! It's not like old Murchison to be so careless. No doubt he did wander off somewhere with amnesia. Must have been slipping in his mind to make so many mistakes!"

"Macsie!" There was distinct edge of impatience in the voice that called out to him. "Are you going to stay in there all night, looking at some silly book and muttering to yourself?"

Recalled to himself, McKenzie Muir hastily turned out his study light. He strode into his bedroom, found he still held the purplish volume in his hand, and set it down upon a bureau, putting the reading glass on top of the picture of the hungry little dragon.

Then, having extinguished the light, he did not give the thing another thought.

Even the crash of the reading glass falling to the floor some time later did not attract his attention.

THE disappearance of McKenzie Muir was really a delightful sensation for the tabloids. Not only did he have money, but in the empty bedroom from which he vanished the police found a number of feminine garments, neatly arranged, and

several long blonde hairs on the pillow beside that on which Mr. Muir, presumably, had slept.

There was no more trace of the second party whose presence was thus to be inferred than of Mr. Muir, however.

Since there was very little disarray—a broken reading glass on the floor, the bedclothes tossed in a heap into a corner, a long strip from a silken garment that might have been a nightgown caught on the knob of a bureau drawer—the disappearances were most mysterious. Resorting to the vague statement that they were working on clues, the police presently found it convenient merely to forget about the whole affair.

So the house was put in order, and the servants dismissed. It was Johnson, the butler, performing his last duties, who slipped the odd volume that his master had stolen from Waldo Murchison onto a shelf, and made everything neat.

As he handled the volume, which the police had glanced at, closed, and put aside, it fell open in his hands at the picture of a small dragon. Johnson gazed at it for a moment with passing interest.

"Jolly fat little beast," he commented to Dora, the maid, who was locking the windows. "Got a grin on him from ear to ear." Then, closing the book and putting it away, they left the study to gather dust.

The house remained tightly locked for some months, while some distant cousins sought to prove that McKenzie Muir was dead so that they might inherit. Then one winter night a defective wire started the fire that before morning had reduced the entire structure to a heap of charred beams and powdery ashes fallen into the cellar hole.

And once again the tabloids received an unexpected godsend. The discovery of bones constituting the mortal remains of no less than sixteen human beings, together with some larger bones whose origin was obscure, pleasantly titillated several million newspaper readers for almost a week.

THE scientists to whom the unidentifiable bones were taken were more than titillated, however. They were at first interested, and then vexed as they found themselves unable to come to any agreement as to the creature those skeletal remains had once belonged to. Eventually, however, they were able to salve their professional pride by announcing that the bones belonged to some hitherto unknown species of sabre-tooth tiger.

So that, except for one small point, the authorities in the end were able to explain the whole affair rather neatly. The bones, they concluded, represented the victims of McKenzie Muir, a homicidal maniac who lured people to his residence, killed them, and buried them in the cellar. Undoubtedly he had so treated his unfortunate friend, Waldo Murchison. The blonde had of course suffered a similar fate. Then Muir, becoming frightened, had cleverly vanished.

Later he had returned to the locked house, to burn it and destroy the evidence of his crimes, and himself had perished in the flames — for easily recognizable among the grisly relics dug forth by the searchers had been McKenzie Muir's dentures.

Thus almost all the loose ends were tied up with cleverness and dexterity. The only point for which the authorities never were able to offer any plausible explanation was the question of what, exactly, a sabre-tooth tiger was doing in the house.

The Whispering Wine

By THORNE LEE

YOU can have your ghosts! I got all I want of them, but I know where you can still get a few quarts, if you're interested. Yes, that's right: Ghosts! They only come in quart sizes.

It was strictly the Boss's idea in the first place. He said to me, "Hatch, I wonder

Fear can take a man's face in its two hands and twist that face into a horrible knot with nothing that looks human left to it.

if you'll ever make a good, honest criminal. Sometimes I think you aren't really sincere in your work."

I knew he was warming me up for something pretty sinister. I started to give him the old sauce: "Boss, I don't like the careless way you use that word, criminal. A criminal is just an individual who disapproves of the 'status quo,' which for your enlightenment—"

"Don't give me that college education gab!" snapped the Boss. "This next job is strictly muscle stuff, and you got to talk tough!"

"Okay then, how's this," I said: "A criminal is just a guy who don't like the way things are, so he does 'em different, and about ninety per cent of everybody would like to do things different. So what? So we're all criminals!"

"That's the line I want, son," the Boss said to me, very fatherly. "Now this little job is at a place called Glen Echo—"

"Mountains?" I yelped, gleeful.

"Somewhere north of San Berdoo," the Boss grunted, slapping a newspaper on his desk.

HE HAD drawn a little box around a single paragraph, which said:

"Is Professor Joel Lehn, famous inventor, working secretly for the war department? His mysterious retirement for the past six months at a lonely cabin in the California Sierras has aroused the curiosity of newspaper men, but the Professor refuses any interviews—"

"What that guy needs is a press agent," I said.

"Not now," said the Boss. "After that article, what he needs is a bodyguard. All the foreign governments will have their toughest gunmen on his trail. You will apply for the body job tomorrow. Of course, if you find that the Professor really is on to something big, you will act accordingly."

I said, "Boss, you ain't goin' into the war racket, too?"

"Uncle Sam has a lot of money to pay for what he wants," said the Boss.

I groaned. "Don't I know. My last income tax—"

"Get going!" the Boss clipped, "or that body you're going to guard will be a dead one!"

That was funny! If the Boss only knew how close he came with that crack!

IT WASN'T exactly a racket, the way the Boss had his business figured. We were a very legitimate private dick agency, and was it wrong to work a few angles of our own whenever we struck something ripe? The Boss figured that we kept the real criminals out of things by getting in ahead of 'em, and it's better for a respectable business man to have his fingers in your pockets than a guy who is really dishonest.

Anyway, that's how I come to be riding an old broken down hack up a mountain road that the government ought to do something about.

I wasn't any too soon. There were three other people riding to Glen Echo in the storekeeper's sedan, and I figured it was too much of a coincidence to be true.

I could see that none of the three was glad to see me. One was just a big tough overgrown kid, probably twenty-five—the kind who starts robbing banks at the age of twelve. The other man was the hard-to-figure type. I guessed he was very old for his looks. He had one of those cold, hard faces that don't wrinkle but just gradually set, like cement. His hair was long and coal black, but the sideburns were thick, milk-white, like a man who clamps a toupee on his head and forgets to tuck in the edges. His head was so big that you never noticed his body, how it was dwarfed from the hips down. I'm over six feet, but that head made me

dwindle in size. It was a very handsome head, but it wasn't pretty, if you get what I mean.

I liked the girl, though. I usually look at the body first and work up to the face, but this blonde had everything right between those sad blue eyes and that round white neck. The cheeks seemed to tremble they were so soft, and her lips smiled even when they didn't mean to. She had the figure to support it, too, when you got around to noticing. I wondered what she was doing with a couple of thugs like that.

"I'm a newspaper guy," I explained to the man with the big head. "Hatch Egert."

"What paper?" he snapped.

I never get caught like that. "The Chronicle," I said. "You friends of the Professor's?"

He laid a folded paper in my lap. There was an ad marked in the Help Wanted Column: "Small theatrical troupe of two or three, willing to assist in scientific experiment. Expenses and salaries. Restful conditions. Write, GLEN ECHO, California."

I couldn't figure what an inventor would want with a corny show troupe, but I wasn't doing much figuring yet. I hadn't even bothered to notice where the big boy's coat bulged with gun butts. It's so peaceful in the mountains.

Joel Lehn's cabin was something. Made me think of the horse barns at Santa Anita. At the top Glen Echo canyon broke into three loose ends like a frayed rope, and the cabin had three wings that fitted right into the grooves. The rest was just wild brush and scrub, and in California that's wild!

"Who'd wanta hole up in a spot like this?" grunted Sol Abbott, the young punk.

"Me for one!" I said, sniffing the raw air. "This stuff gives me vitamins."

"I love it!" said Rayma Donelson. The name fitted her—smooth.

"I can see that you and I got lots in common," I said to her.

The girl smiled, but the guy with the big head didn't. His cold eyes reached out and slapped her hard across the mouth. He was like that with people. He could hurt them without moving a muscle. His name was Serge Michael. Abbott always called him Mister.

"Are you sure this is Glen Echo?" the Michael asked old Kim Jones, who was driving us.

The storekeeper grunted, "Ain't no other!"

"It's strange that a man like Joel Lehn would let his home run down like this. Every one of those windows is broken! That left wing seems ready to collapse!"

"Earthquake, maybe," said the old man, scratching his gray beard. "We get lots of 'em. Ain't heard of none lately, though."

IT DID seem funny about the broken windows, but I was busy wondering how Serge Michael knew about a man named Joel Lehn. Not from that newspaper ad. Nor from me. If this Michael was supposed to be tricky, he would have to watch his remarks closer.

There was broken glass strewn all over the porch. The door was wide open and I was the first one through. The big front room off the center wing was homey and comfortable. With one glance I took in the half-filled pipe on the smoking-stand; an open book on the table, and the bowl of fruit beside it. It was like a place that's lived in, but still it didn't seem right. The fireplace was full of cold, dry ash-dust. I tapped the bowl of the forgotten pipe and my thumb came away with a smudge of dust. An apple core on the table had shriveled up like a dry leaf.

I knew that Joel Lehn hadn't seen this room in a week, but I waited to see how sharp the Michael was.

Michael didn't say a word, but he leaned

heavy on his cane and his eyes whipped around the room. Then he twisted around quick, his dwarf-legs tying in a knot. His cane shot out, the elbow-hook catching the shoulder of old Kim Jones, who was backing out the door. "Wait!" he snapped. "We may want to go back with you."

"It gits dark early!" muttered the old man.

"You afraid of the dark?" said Sol Abbott.

"Not ordinary, human dark, I ain't!" growled old Kim.

"Yeah?" I said. "What's different about the dark around here?"

Old Kim pushed away Michael's cane and shrugged. "Places gits the smell of people livin' in 'em. This place is a dead place, I can tell ye."

Old Kim's talk was enough to get us interested. I wanted to look around, and the Michael didn't seem to want me out of his sight; so we all went together. It was routine stuff until we got to a solid oak door in the basement. I have a way with locks, and I wangled this one easy. There was a long, cement-walled tunnel that seemed to bore right into the mountain. We found light switches and the bulbs were working; upstairs they were all broken.

I was the first one to spot the laboratory: If you'd take a long glass tube and tie it into all the knots in the Boy Scout Manual you'd have something like the apparatus which sprouted out of a huge glass flask squatting in the middle of the room. Under the flask was a gas burner. Serge Michael's face was a blank, but I looked in his eyes and it was like he was licking his lips with glee.

Sol Abbott found the wine cellar through a side door. His laugh belched out so loud that the big web of glass tube trembled. "Have a look, Mister!" he hollered.

There were rows and rows of bottles, every size and shape. I picked up a whiskey bottle built like Mae West and there was a neat white label with a lot of symbols which didn't make sense. "Greek, maybe," I said.

All the bottles had little labels. The Michael was getting more excited in the eyes. Rayma Donelson said, "Imagine one man drinking all that stuff!"

Sol Abbott wiped his lips. "I'm gonna like it here," he said.

"Seems to be just a common distillery," said the Michael, very matter-of-fact.

"Seems to be, like hell!" I thought.

I saw Sol Abbott tuck a wine bottle up his sleeve on the way out.

When we got upstairs the Michael had decided to stay the night, and I knew it wasn't to drink wine. I thought about young Abbott drinking the stuff, and I wondered how he would look after a chaser of nitroglycerin. Must be some kind of explosive, I thought, if it's war material. I didn't like the reckless way Abbott was carrying that bottle, but I couldn't say anything to give the Michael ideas.

The Michael set Sol Abbott to cleaning up broken glass and turned loose the girl in the kitchen. Old Kim Jones high-tailed off in his sedan when twilight clamped the lid on, the sudden way it does in California. I said if there was something to be afraid of around here, it ought to make good newspaper stuff. I also said I could make gravy.

That got me in the kitchen with Rayma. "Does it still give you a thrill when you first get out there under the proscenium?" I asked her.

She looked at me, blinking. "I always like the mountains at night," she said.

"Well, that's settled. Now, if you're not an actress, what are you?"

"Why, what do you mean?" she gasped.

"Lady, if you were an actress, you'd know what I meant by the proscenium, and it ain't mountains at night! Tell me about yourself. I'm always on your side!"

I got a loop on her waist and we wres-

tled for a minute, but when I got my mouth nicely planted on her red lips, I could tell she liked it. "You must get away from here," she whispered, kind of pushing and pulling me at the same time. "They'd kill you in a minute!"

"Two minutes maybe," I said. "I'm tough. I'll get out in ten seconds, if you'll come along."

Her eyes bulged. "I couldn't do that. They do terrible things to people who run away—things you can't talk about!"

"How did you get into this league?" I said.

She sighed. "I was born in it."

"That runt isn't your father?"

"Oh no! My father—they keep him in prison!"

"I see," I said. "Think I'll stick around. I don't like guys who carry guns."

I squeezed another kiss out of her, and just then the voices began to talk.

Rayma whipped out of my arms. "What's that?" she said.

VOICES. They were right in the house, in the same room with us. It wasn't nice. It was a lot of words all twisted up, toppling over each other, snarling around each other, like a dozen people talking at once. It was just blab, but it made you think of a ditchful of snakes, slopping and sliding all over themselves. I could feel my spine tying itself in a knot.

They came from every place, bouncing out of the cupboards, slithering down from the ceiling, rolling around the floor. You can't imagine voices doing that. I can. I was there.

Rayma wasn't hanging on to me. I was hanging on to her. "Who is it?" I shouted.

The answer was a lot of hissing sibilants and wailing vowels that wriggled in and out of my ears.

All of a sudden they stopped. I dug my ears out with one hand. With the other I seemed to be holding up the remains of a beautiful blonde. I carried her in by the fireplace and draped her on a sofa. Sol Abbott was there on a chair with his tongue hanging out, looking right through me.

"Did you hear 'em, too?" I said.

The young punk was shattered, I could see, just like safety glass. He wagged his tongue and mumbled nonsense. Serge Michael came in from outside and found us like that, staring at each other. He swore and pulled a long wine bottle out of Abbott's stiff fingers. "You damn fools!" he murmured. "Have you been drinking that stuff?"

Abbott's eyes cleared up a bit, but he was a long time finding his voice. "I didn't drink it, Mister," he moaned, squeezing his head. "Honest!"

Michael sneered and tilted the bottle. It was empty.

Abbott gaped. "It wasn't empty a minute ago!" he wailed. "I was gonna drink, but I didn't. There was people's voices talkin', Mister. You never heard such—"

The Michael brought his cane down hard across the boy's knuckles where they gripped his knee. Abbott yelped.

"The kid's right!" I snapped.

Michael whirled and jammed his stick in my ribs. I grabbed it and pushed the dwarf back against the wall. "You and I can do business, but don't give me that cane stuff or I'll tear you limb from limb! Such as they are!" I snorted, glancing at his shrivelled legs.

The Michael didn't like it, but he took it. "You tell me what happened," he said.

I TOLD him and he was so excited that his eyes were doing snake dances. He didn't speak; he just trotted his big head down to the basement and that wine cellar.

"It was like ghosts!" Sol Abbott muttered.

"Indubitably," I said. One of my best

words. While the boy wrestled with it, I worked on Rayma. I took one of those First Aid courses.

When the girl came around I suggested that she could do with a nice, cool walk under the vast "proscenium" of the night.

We found a trail climbing up behind the cabin. "What is a 'proscenium,' anyway?" she asked, squeezing my hand.

"I'm glad you're a little stupid," I said. "I don't like gals that know everything. The prosceninm is that big square arch at the front of a stage; it's what the audience looks through to see a play."

I was using my flash to feel our way along. The girl shied from something in the path and screamed down my neck. I picked up a dead rabbit. Harmless enough, and yet there was something different about it. Have you ever seen a frightened rabbit at the end of a flashlight beam, with its eyes popping out of its skull? This rabbit was like that, only the look was frozen right into the body. Otherwise there wasn't a scratch on it. Poison maybe, I thought.

I hung on to the rabbit for awhile, just so the girl would hang on to me. That was only the beginning. Farther up the trail we heard something moving in the brush. I doused my light and crept toward it. I tried to be quiet, but in that dry scrub I sounded like a small army. In a patch of moonlight I met the thing face to face. The animal let out a squeal and leaped a good ten feet, right over my head.

I trotted back to Rayma. "This is a damned queer jungle, I said. "I never heard of a deaf deer before, but I'll swear that baby didn't hear me at all, and I'm no Daniel Boone!"

"Let's go back!" the girl said, shivering.

"Shucks kid, you haven't seen anything yet," I said and gave her a taste of what I meant, which she seemed to like.

I didn't know the half of it. About fifty yards farther there was something long and black crouching in the path, and around it a bunch of little eyes picked up the beams of my light and winked them back at me. The bottom of my stomach fell out, but I kept going mainly because Rayma was behind me and I didn't want to trample her. Finally I made out a big foot sticking up, and I couldn't think of any animal that wears shoes. The blinking eyes turned out to be hundreds of slivers of broken glass, reflecting my light. I bent over the body, took a long look, and then I whipped around and pushed the girl back.

"We better get back for some help," I said in a voice that was dead and buried.

I let Abbott and Michael look for the body. I'd seen enough. In my business you get to look at a lot of dead men, but I never saw one to compare with this. I know now you can frighten a man so bad that fear becomes torture. Fear can take a man's face in its two hands and twist that face into a horrible knot with nothing that looks human left to it, except maybe the big bloated pupil of an eye or two gaping holes that used to be nostrils. The teeth and lips are nothing but ugly red scabs, from grinding the tongue into shreds. As I've said before, you can have it!

MICHAEL let the body lie where it was, I guess. When he came back he seemed quite happy in his best Dracula manner.

To celebrate the event the rat produced a big bottle of wine and asked us all to sit in on it. "I thought you were against drinking the stuff!" I said.

The Michael let his eyes wash over me very mildly. "I always drink to the forming of a partnership," he said.

"Yeah? Who's gonna be partners?"

"You want a story and I want more help. I suggest that we pool our resources," he said smoothly.

"It's got to be a good story!" I snapped.

"It will be. You must admit that you don't know what hapened to Professor Lehn? I think I do. It will make remarkable reading in the—what was the name of that paper?"

" 'The Chronicle,' if I remember right," I sneered.

"As the beginning of our business association, I think we should share all information that we have secretly observed—"

"Such as?" I inquired.

The Michael produced a big knob of glass from his pocket. It was broken off at the base. "Such as this," he offered. "Ever see anything like it before?"

"Yeah," I said. "There's a glass bell down in the wine cellar about half as big as a barrel. It had a handle on top just like that."

"I like men who observe things. Apparently, Professor Lehn was carrying a glass jar to some sort of storehouse. Apparently, he dropped it," said the dwarf. "What else have you seen?"

"I've seen a young deer that was deaf as a post, I drawled proudly. "Can you top that?"

The Michaels nodded. "Excellent. It would seem that there must have been a violent explosion in the vicinity, enough to deafen a deer."

"And bust a lot of windows, and kill a lot of animals," I added.

"A lot of animals?"

"I saw two or three," I said, "and that man's been dead quite a while. If the animals aren't dead, why haven't they been busy?"

Rayma Doncison shrieked.

"What puzzles me," I went on, "is why an explosion wouldn't tear up trees and things. Did you see any signs?"

"I think," said the Michael, "that we are dealing with something new in the way of explosions. Shall we drink to more discoveries?"

I shrugged. I knew I wouldn't be the first one to taste that bottled stuff.

We never got around to that, anyway. Sol Abbott had no more than popped the cork on the wine bottle than things began to happen.

It was those damned voices again! Uncanny, it was. The room was alive with them. If it was ghosts, I could see why people are afraid of them; they didn't talk sense. A dribble of words like that, coming from every direction, is enough to turn any man's stomach. Serge Michael was the only one who didn't sprain his neck trying to find the voices.

It stopped in less than two minutes. I yanked the bottle and a glass from Sol Abbott. "I think I need a drink!" I said.

I tilted the bottle and stared at the nothing which poured out of it. "Hey!" I yelped. "This's an empty bottle!"

Sol Abbott leaped up. "See, Mister! It's like I told you. That bottle wasn't empty a minute ago!"

"Don't be a dope!" I snorted. "If it wasn't empty, where's the stuff now?"

The Michael twiddled his crooked, dwarf fingers. "I expected you to be more clever, Hutch."

"Hatch!"

"Hatch. Obviously, if the wine is gone, it has evaporated!"

"In two minutes flat?" I bellowed. "There ain't no such juice!"

"You forget Joel Lehn was an inventor. An inventor is supposed to create wonders."

"Well, I'll be damned!" I said. "What good is a wine that evaporates before you can drink it?"

The Michael laughed with his teeth, but his lips were still cruel. "Most wines loosen people's tongues. This wine seems to preserve them."

I gulped. "Are you trying to say that those voices came out of that bottle?"

"I don't say it. The bottle speaks for

itself. What a creation — a wine that talks!"

"I don't believe it!" I said. "I'd rather believe in ghosts."

To prove his point, the Michael took Sol Abbott down to the wine cellar, leaving me to discuss the new angle with the girl. Rayma and I got our arms untangled before they came back.

Each of the thugs brought an armload of bottles. I couldn't read the symbols, but I knew enough Roman numerals to see that Michael had picked the bottles that numbered one to ten. Before he opened number one he parked each one of us in a corner with a pad and pencil and told us to write down every word that we recognized. "Keep writing even after the voices stop!" he insisted. "Put down everything you can remember."

I decided our partnership wasn't so legal that I couldn't pull a fast one. I didn't tell Michael that I am the Boss's stenog in my weak moments. I'm a demon on shorthand.

The Michael was right about the wine. He flipped out a cork and grabbed his pencil, and the wine fizzed just like champagne, but every bubble was a word and they came so fast and loud that it was like taking dictation from a tommy-gun. Even so I got a lot of them down. As I say, I'm a demon.

I copied off about thirty words on another sheet and handed them to the dwarf. "Excellent!" he remarked. "I'm glad I asked you in. You're sharp!"

All in all he only got about seventy-five different words out of the mess. I had near two hundred in shorthand.

We opened all ten bottles and I got at least five words to everyone that Michael had on his list.

WHEN it was over, I said, "The more I hear that stuff, the more it sounds like the same man's voice. There's a lot of changes in pitch and volume, but it's the same quality behind 'em. It just seems like a lot of voices because it comes so fast. What I can't figure is why any guy in his right mind would want to talk so fast when he's got nothing to say in the first place."

"Just like playing a phonograph record backwards," said Sol Abbott, shaking an empty bottle.

The Michael reached out with his eyes and gave Abbott a good shaking up, as much as to say, "If you must have ideas, keep them to yourself!"

Then the Michael bent over his list of words and pulled the thick blinds of his eyebrows down over his black, piercing eyes. Whatever he was doing, we were shut out of it, just as though he had slammed a door in our faces.

"Think I'll find myself a slab of hay," I said.

Sol Abbott stretched out on a sofa. I could see Rayma didn't like me to leave her, but there was no place to go except bedrooms, and I'm really a decent sort, though you probably hadn't guessed it.

I found the kind of room I wanted, tucked under the eaves upstairs. There was a small dresser that I could use for a desk. I blocked the cracks of the door, drew the blinds and used my flash for a light. I didn't want the dwarf to know I was free-lancing.

I could follow the dwarf's reasoning: If he could unravel all that ghostly talk, it might explain the secret of the whispering wine. I knew that I could figure it out just as well as Michael could, especially when I was several hundred words ahead of him. Things like that only show what a college education will do for you.

I took only the first bottleful of gibberish. There was no logic in trying to unscramble all ten bottles at once. I'm pretty good at crossword puzzles, but this was different. To make it easier I made

five lists of the words: phrases of more than one word, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and a fifth list for all the extra little stuff that holds a sentence together.

Although at the time it had sounded mostly like hash, I discovered from my notes that a lot of words gushed out in phrases or half-sentences that made a certain amount of sense. This would put me way ahead of the dwarf, because I was the only one who could possibly have gotten down so many words in rapid succession.

The longest single phrase gave me a clue to the whole show. It went: "intend to explode the theory that a solid is the best conductor of sound."

There was one fancy bit that went: "the deep, throaty voice of the great oceans." That blasted wine bottle spouted poetry!

Some of the words I put on the wrong lists, of course. For example, I had "babble" and "chatter" first as verbs and then later as nouns.

There were very few words broken in half. Whenever I found a syllable or piece of word that could mean almost anything, I tossed it overboard.

When I ran out of ready-made phrases, I started fitting words together that seemed to belong to each other. Once I had wised-up to the Professor's literary style, I turned out several fancy mouthfuls. I soon figured that the word "lane" should have been "Lehn," and all of a sudden I had "Professor Joel Lehn, the inventor." Words like "revolutionary device" went together like boy meets girl, but some were tougher, such as "the process of vapor condensation."

I MADE plenty of false starts—probably fifty at least. It was a struggle before I would give up "stupid, misguided, feeble ladies," because they sure make a choice phrase. Finally I settled for "ladies and gentlemen."

I had to throw in a few of my own words in parentheses, to fill out the gaps, but here is the way I got it doped, just before the dawn poked its head in the window and I fell asleep in my chair:

"Ladies and gentlemen. (This is) Professor Joel Lehn, the inventor (speaking). (You are listening) to my greatest achievement, the ultimate in sound reproduction. That stupid, misguided body known as the scientific world, wasting its feeble mind energy on war, violence, and destruction (has failed) to grasp the true (possibilities) of sound and tone. (By this) demonstration I intend to explode the theory that a solid is the best conductor of sound. Why (have scientists) neglected liquid as a sound phenomenon? Why must they torture the ear and shatter the peace of man with crude, electrical sound instruments, ignoring (the fact) that true tonal perfection is a fluid, not a solid quality? The secret has cried out to them in the babble and chatter of every brook, in the deep, throaty voice of the great oceans, in the (gurgle) of bubbling champagne. (This bottle) proves it is (possible) to capture and to store up sound in liquid form by projecting sound impulses (into) (during?) the process of vapor condensation. By the opposite process of evaporation, the sound may be released. This bottle of concentrated liquid sound, like a phonograph (record), will tell my story for me. What at first (seems) terrifying will soon be recognized as a perfect sound machine (with) the cool tone quality of running water. (I have prepared) in the same manner a complete description of this revolutionary device, which will be continued in other bottles."

Part of it was sheer guesswork, but I was pretty proud of my effort—especially that one: "the gurgle of bubbling champagne!" "Gurgle" was my own idea!

I was gurgling down my own throat when I woke up with a snore so loud that it scared me. For a while I was com-

pletely fogged, and then I remembered: Words out of a bottle, sound in liquid form, whispering wine!

I muttered to myself, "You may be able to seal up a word in a bubble of wine, Professor, but can you teach a wine bottle to speak the King's English?"

I folded up my scribblings and crammed them in a pocket. I could hear voices and they weren't coming out of a bottle. Down on the front path I could see the dwarf, swinging on his cane. He handed a long envelope to Rayma Donelson and pointed his stick toward the fork of the main road, where a mailbox perched on a stump.

I beat it out the back door and did a Boy Scout slouch through the scrub, working around to the mailbox before Rayma arrived. When she saw me, she looked happy but scared. She has that kind of hair that stays awake all night and comes out bright as the sun in the morning. I saw her cram the envelope down the throat of her dress.

I grabbed her for a quick kiss and the letter crackled.

"Let me see it," I said.

She knew what I meant. "I can't!" she said. "He'd kill me!"

"That runt?"

"You don't know him. He's the cruelest man I ever knew—and terrible cunning; he seems to know your thoughts before you think them! He always knows when I'm lying."

"Baby, we're wasting time!" I snapped. "You wouldn't want me to go after that envelope, would you?"

Her eyes were big circles. "You wouldn't dare!"

I laughed. "Listen, baby, there are only two reasons that I ever molest a lady—business and pleasure. This is business."

I started to demonstrate; so she went after the envelope fast.

"Thanks, kid. I don't like to be a cad, but it pays well," I said, and then I made another grab for her. "This is pleasure, this time."

She wiggled out of my clutches and laid a backhand across my jaw.

I shrugged and started up the path. "Think it over," I said. "An American rat is better than an Axis diplomat. Let me know when you want that dwarf pushed in the face."

Back in the cabin the Michael and his stooge seemed to be down in the laboratory. I took a quick peek at the letter. It was addressed to a man in Washington, D. C., and I don't mean J. Edgar Hoover.

The letter told everything that had happened since we arrived.

Sure enough, the dwarf had included his own interpretation of the crossword puzzle that belched out of that wine bottle. This is the way his version went: "Ladies and gentlemen, Professor Joel Lehn will be recognized by the scientific world as the inventor of the most terrifying sound phenomenon known to man. This demonstration—this bottle of wine—proves that it is possible, by projecting tone impulses into liquid form, to create the ultimate achievement in instruments of war and destruction. Through the process of vapor condensation, I have been able to store up great sound energy that will, by the opposite process of evaporation, explode with violence. Enough sound force is released by a single bottle of this concentrated fluid to shatter the ear and torture the mind and body."

WELL, I nearly split a rib laughing. To think the guy could get an entirely different story out of the same words! It only goes to show that a person usually finds what he's looking for.

The Michael had a little comment of his own at the end of the letter. "Gentlemen, imagine!" it said. "An explosion that strikes like an unseen hand, leaving no visible marks, but with all the man-

shattering power of a giant gunshell—terrific, hellish sound concussion that either kills or drives men mad. The whole democratic world will quail in its boots!

"Since the liquid evaporates automatically upon exposure to air, the amount of explosion can be controlled by limiting the process of evaporation. I am already experimenting with the liquid sound as a means of individual torture. If a man can be crazed to a certain extreme, without any physical pain, he will tell anything and be alive to tell it! I have an excellent ready-made guinea pig by the name of Hutch Egert. . . ."

"Guinea pig!" I roared, and crunched the letter in my fist. "We'll settle that right now!"

I'll never forget what I saw when I busted into the laboratory. At first it looked like a body wearing a fish-bowl for a head. Then I saw that the dwarf had put a huge glass jug over Sol Abbott's head, stuffing cloth around the shoulders and neck, with just enough cracks for air to circulate. The jug had a spout and Michael had jammed the throat of a wine bottle into it so that the liquid would evaporate inside the jug.

I could hear a noise like a dozen dog fights going on in that jug. Sol Abbott was tying his body into a crazy knot. His face was awful. The eyes were rolling—in opposite directions! The skin tightened against his jawbones as though two hands were yanking his ears back on his skull. I saw his gnashing teeth with the bare tongue lying helpless between them, and I dived.

I meant to slap the wine bottle out of Michael's hand, but my shoulder caught him in the ribs and rolled him into a corner. He piled up there, all head and no legs, like a spider drawn up into a ball.

I lifted the glass jar from young Abbott's head and crashed it hard on the cement floor in front of the dwarf, hoping that a few splinters would find their way into his hide.

"What d'ya think this is, a concentration camp?" I snapped.

The dwarf looked up at me, all eyes, and I knew I had a fight on my hands.

I started working on Abbott, but he was crazy! He kept muttering, over and over: "I didn't drink any—not a drop!"

I know how those fellows felt when Moses turned a stick into a snake. I saw that cane of the dwarf's suddenly come to life. It lashed out at me with a swishing sound, slicing right through my belt and my clothes and there was a long red scratch running down the middle aisle of my rib-section. The dwarf was wobbling on his legs, but his cane was now a long rapier, razor-sharp. And my pants were falling down!

I've read "The Three Musketeers," but that's all I know about sword fighting. There was nothing at hand but the jagged neck of a broken bottle, which was very one-sided. I found myself against the wall, making weird passes at thin air, while a sharp blade tickled my Adam's apple.

"What do I do now?" I cracked.

The dwarf smiled, but his teeth weren't funny. "You have a sense of humor," he said. "Now I shall demonstrate my own. Will you please sit down, Mr. Hutch?"

"Hatch!" I said. "No reason to be so polite. Let's all sit down."

HE DIDN'T answer. He just tickled me into the chair. Rayma Donelson stepped into the room with those pretty saucer eyes, and he made her tie me to the chair.

"You're all wrong about this thing," I said to Michael. "It isn't supposed to be an explosive. It's just a new way to record sound. This guy Lehn figured out that liquid is a better conductor of sound than anything we've got now. So he thought up this scheme of bottling sound by distilling

this wine stuff and shooting words into it at the same time. I don't know what sort of apparatus he used, but it must be tricky. Where he slipped up was thinking that the stuff would evaporate the same way it went into the bottle. Instead the words were all mixed up. Do you get the picture?"

"How did you know all that?" snapped the Michael.

"I'm way ahead of you!" I said. "I do shorthand. And I didn't sleep last night."

The dwarf shrugged. "I'll teach you not to deceive me. Whatever the Professor's intentions were I shall improve upon them. When I get through here I am sure you will do anything I tell you. And you will talk. Oh, yes. You will tell everything. They'll all talk, all of them—whatever is on their minds will come out—the fools!"

At the end his voice was wound up to a scream.

Rayma wasn't happy about it. The dwarf found another big jar, and clamped it down over my head. The last thing I heard was the girl's voice, thin and sharp: "What are you going to do?"

My eyes began to bulge even before he got the neck of another wine bottle tucked into my headpiece. I blinked at Rayma and let my lungs out with: "I'm always on your side!"

My voice exploded like a bomb inside that glass shell. I knew what I could expect from that talking machine-gun in the wine bottle. I began to think about a lot of nice people who would have to go through this same little scene. I guess the girl was thinking about it, too, because I saw her trembling, and she reached toward one of the shelves of bottles that lined the wall. She stood on a chair to get a bottle that would make a good club.

I saw her slip, grab for the top shelf, and start the bottles rolling. A big gallon jar crashed to the floor and all hell broke loose. Rayma threw up her hands and crumpled to the floor, the way a soldier topples into a shell explosion.

The dwarf began to spin around and around on the tiny sticks of his legs.

The Professor's web of glass tubes splintered into a sleet of fine glass that I could feel needling through my clothes. My glass shell split in half and fell away from my shoulders. Luckily, it had protected my ears. In a flash it came to me what had happened to Joel Lehn out there on the mountain—he dropped one of those big jars and the concussion killed him.

The dwarf had gone berserk from the shock. I could see what was coming. He was heading for the shelf of bottles.

I had to get Rayma out, and there I was tied to a chair. With a twist I toppled the chair, banging my head on the floor. I managed to get up on my knees and one shoulder, doubled up like a caterpillar caught in mid-stride.

"Michael, wait!" I hissed.

The madman laughed and smashed a quart bottle on the floor. That sound stabbed through my brain. I had to grind my teeth into the cement. The room was swimming around me, but I managed to wiggle over to the girl. I got her wrist in my mouth, and began to drag her toward the door, inch by inch. Every time Michael broke a bottle I wanted to scream and gnaw something. The poor girl's wrist was a mess.

I saw the dwarf, a bouncing monkey, leaping high in the air. With a cut of his sword he swept off a whole row of bottles.

THEY say a madman is strong as a dozen men. I know the shock of those bursting bottles was so great that I tore loose from that chair with a terrible convulsion.

I must have done the thing that was fixed in my mind, because I don't remem-

ber throwing the girl to my shoulder with one hand and holding up my pants with the other. I do remember a huge glass cask of that explosive stuff, the size that killed Joel Lehn, trembling on the edge of its shelf. I reached the end of the tunnel before it fell and then the world went to pieces around me.

When I came to, lying on the floor of the tunnel, Rayma was mauling my face with kisses and shouting over and over, like a broken record, "I love you, I love you."

She must have had that on her mind before the fireworks started, because right now she was out of her head. I slapped her back to normal.

We groped back along the darkened tunnel; my flashlight picked out the two bodies on the floor of the laboratory.

As I said, the Michael's body was hardly a body at all, just a little knot of flesh. But the head was big, very big, and the thing in his mind was still there in his bursting eyes: "Kill and torture, torture and kill!"

It was torture to look at them.

Rayma was wrapped tight around my neck, and when we got out of that place she wouldn't let me go. "I hope you know what you're doing," I said.

She was still with me when I got back to the office.

"Boss, what do you think of men, and women, and children being tortured until they go mad?" I asked.

The Boss said, "How much money is there in it?"

I said, "That's all I wanted to know. I quit!"

"Yeah," he sneered. "Who's been giving you offers—Pinkertons?"

"Pinkertons!" I snorted. "Shucks, I got offers from Uncle Sam! I'm gonna join the army!"

The Boss had no answer for that. I may repeat it when I get to be a sergeant, but not here.

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Lil

By MINDRET LORD

I DOUBT if a bird knows where it's going when it starts out on a migration. It probably doesn't even know it's going anywhere in particular. It just takes off and instinct, or some force we don't understand, leads it to its destination. I think that's the way it was with Tony Cross, the night he met the woman he married.

Tony was a big, lean, easy-moving lad

All men look forward to finding the perfect girl . . . perhaps it has something to do with the small case with a gold lock.

with a tan face and blue eyes that were a little squinty as if to keep out the sun. He left his bachelor apartment and started out, this night, without any very clear idea in his head of what he wanted to do. He felt restless. He didn't want to go on a party, which would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to do, because everybody wanted Tony Cross, at any time. He didn't want to get tight. He didn't want to take in a show. He just wanted to go out. Probably he thought the impulse was his own.

HE WALKED through the park for a while, thinking about nothing—football, maybe, or golf, of fishing off the Florida Keys. Perhaps he walked for an hour or so and then he left the park without noticing the direction, and without any idea of where he was bound for. All he knew was, he didn't want to go home yet, and he didn't want to hunt up anybody he knew. On a corner there was a nice-looking little bar and he thought he would go in and quench the thirst he had worked up. He stepped in—and there was the girl he had been coming toward all the time. Not that he knew that.

She was a honey—there's no getting around that. I'll make the point, though—and you'll see what I mean, later—why shouldn't she have been a honey? Unless I'm wrong it was just a matter of a few words, a crystal shaped like a hen's egg, and the rest was a matter of choice. She had black hair that curled on her shoulders and shone with bronze and purple lights; her skin was like a magnolia petal; the curving of her body was what men dream about, because they are a thankless lot who can never be satisfied by the looks of any normal woman. Her mouth was like the rest of her—too good to be true; and her eyes were too true to be good. As Tony came in the door, she turned and looked at him. He stumbled over his own feet on the way to the bar where she was sitting alone.

It never occurred to Tony to wonder what a girl like that was doing alone, but I think I can tell you—she was waiting for him. I mean that, literally. She was not just waiting for some good-looking guy with plenty of dough. There was nothing like that about her. No, when the door began to open and she turned her head, she knew whom she was going to see—Anthony Cross.

Her name was Lilith; Tony and she were married about three weeks later.

Lil and Tony got along like a house a-fire. You hear about people who seem to be made for each other but this was it. I guess it wasn't much short of miraculous. Her beauty never got in her way; she liked it because Tony liked it. She kept house easily, she cooked the best food that anybody ever ate, she was the best sport in the world and would do anything you could think of at any time of the day or night; you couldn't spoil her (though Tony tried hard enough). When he took her out, she was a sensation and it didn't go to her head. When they stayed at home, Tony always felt as if he were cheating on all the other men in creation. You will say all this could not be real. I agree with that.

THERE were several mysterious things about Lil. One was that she would never talk about her past. A girl who looked like her would just naturally have to have a past of some important kind—in Hollywood—on Broadway—somewhere. But I had never heard of her and neither had Tony, nor anybody else. You couldn't help wondering why. But if you asked her, she would change the subject so cleverly you wouldn't know she had told you nothing until you were on your way home. Tony never even found out where she was living at the time he met her. I doubt if he cared very much—why would

he? If you find a pearl, you don't worry about what oyster it came from.

Lil had one piece of luggage that was different from the rest of the stuff she brought with her when she and Tony came together.

It was just a small case, about the size of a portable typewriter but the leather was very fine, white parchment, and the lock on it was gold. It was a rather strange lock with a jagged slot that must have taken a remarkably crooked key.

The first time Tony saw the case, he was digging back in a closet for something. He brought it out to the light in the bedroom, and asked, What's this? I never noticed it before."

Lil took it away from him, before she answered. "It's just an old make-up box of mine. I lost the key long ago."

"What's in it?"

"Nothing, I imagine. Probably some old lipstick."

Tony was one of those men who can't resist a lock. "Let's open it," he said. "I'll bet you I can do it with a hairpin."

She was holding it under her arm and she took a step backwards. "No—you'll ruin the lock. I can get a new key made sometime."

He just wanted to show how smart he was. "Ah, come on! Give it to me. I'll have it open in a minute." And he stuck out his hand.

She struck a blow at his arm that was so fast and so hard that he yelped. Her eyes were like burning coals and for the first time, Tony heard fury in her voice. "This is mine! I don't want it opened! I don't want you to touch it! Ever!"

He stared at her in amazement and suddenly she laughed apologetically. "Oh, I'm sorry, darling," she said. "I didn't mean to sound so—awful. Really, I'm sure the case is empty—but even if it isn't, I don't want to open it, because—well, because I'm superstitious about it."

"Why?" Tony's feelings were still a little hurt, even with her so close to him.

She rubbed the arm she had struck. "It's nothing—honestly, darling. It doesn't concern anybody in the world but me—and—and I'd rather not talk about it. You won't make me?"

It was an appeal to chivalry. "Of course not!" He felt like a dog having suggested it in the first place.

That was the end of the incident. Never again in their life together did Tony see Lil in a temper. As for the dressing case he wouldn't have touched it with a barge pole. Any woman in entitled to some privacy, and a woman like Lil was entitled to anything she wanted.

But the most important mystery about Lil was something a great deal pleasanter, from Tony's point of view. The first indication he had of it was one night when they were coming home late from a party. Lil was half asleep, curled up beside Tony on the front seat of the convertible coupé; there were hardly any cars on the streets and he was driving along in a drowsy sort of way when all at once she sat up straight and said, "Stop, Tony! Pull up to the curb!"

LIKE a good driver, Tony braked the car before he asked, "Why? What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

She was looking forward, as if she saw something that amused her for a little, but it was only a moment, and then she said, "I just wanted a cigarette."

"Oh—sure." Tony lit one and gave it to her. As she put it to her lips, a gas main under the pavement three blocks ahead blew up with a roar that shook the city.

It was just luck.

Lil was lucky, all right, and she was clever. When she gave Tony advice (which she never did unless he asked for it) it never failed to be good. Sometimes it was

actually brilliant. Tony's stock went up a long way while he had Lil.

I have said that Tony was crazy about Lil, and he was. But a thing like that is a fever, and eventually his pulse slowed down to normal and his temperature slid back to 96.8 degrees. It took about three years, and at the end of that time he was just as mad about Lil as ever—but in a calmer, easier way.

An ordinary woman would probably not have noticed the gradual change. She would have been changing, too—settling down to a long, quiet, happy marriage. But Lil was no ordinary woman.

Once, Tony caught Lil gazing at him curiously, and he asked her, "What's on your mind, darling? Why have you been so thoughtful lately?"

"I've been thinking—" she answered slowly, "I've been thinking that you don't love me quite so much as I hoped you would."

It was not like Lil. He looked at her for a moment to see if she were serious, then he grabbed her up and set her on his lap. "Now what's this? You know I adore you—beyond all the woman in the world. There's nobody like you. And I'm not such a fool that I don't know it. Give me a kiss—and let's hear no more of such nonsense."

She shook her head. "No." She kissed him with those velvet lips of hers. "No. If I left you—or if something happened to me, you'd soon get over it."

The thought of it was enough to scare Tony. "Don't even speak of such a thing! I couldn't live without you. I tell you in all sincerity—if something happened to you, I wouldn't try to go on living. I'd simply die."

She still shook her head. At last she said, "You're a darling, Tony—and the only man I've wanted in—I've ever wanted. But I'd rather have you love me more."

Tony was almost angry. "I couldn't! I love you as much as it's possible for any mortal man to love!"

She patted him on the cheek and slid off his lap. Apparently she was over her doubts, and the whole thing was forgotten. Tony didn't remember it until about two weeks later—when Lil disappeared.

IT WAS terrible for poor Tony. It did not seem possible that a man could suffer the way he did, and still live. It would have been horrible and tragic if Lil had died in some way—but the uncertainty of the way she vanished was almost worse. Tony came home from the office and she was gone—that's all there was to it. Except for what she had been wearing, she left all her clothes and possessions. Nobody saw her go. There were no clues of any kind. The police and private detectives fooled with the case for a while, and finally gave it up. Tony went on hoping, and at the same time fearing to hope. For a girl as beautiful as Lil to disappear without trace—! It might mean something too awful to imagine, and Tony's brain was sick with imagination. I think he would have ended in an asylum if it had not been for Helen.

Either before or shortly after Lil's disappearance, Helen moved into the apartment next to Tony's; he saw her first on that evening when he was still thinking Lil was probably at a movie and would be home in an hour or two. She came to the door and asked if she could use the telephone, because hers wasn't connected yet.

"Certainly! Certainly!" Tony said. "Come in! By all means!"

Helen was a blond. If Lil was the most beautiful brunette Tony, or any other man, had ever dreamed of, this golden-haired girl was her equal. She was a trifle taller than Lil, and perhaps a little more slender, but she had high, deep breasts and slightly flaring hips, and she carried herself as if she were proud of it. Her face was the

face of a goddess—but not cold, or haughty—just gorgeous.

Helen was a tremendous help to Tony, during the first few months of his agony. He didn't want to see any of his friends because their sympathy was too hard to bear. But Helen lived right next door, and somehow it was easier to talk to her for the very reason that she had not known Lil—and she was an eager listener. Tony poured out his broken heart to her. They dined together practically every night. Then, after four months, Helen tripped over a rug and Tony was there to catch her in his arms.

Tony felt like the worst kind of heel, but he was honest enough to face it: he loved Helen. He loved her as much as Lil. Maybe he loved her more. It was lousy—it was not possible—but it was true.

Now, more than ever before, it was necessary to discover what had happened to Lil. If she could be found, and if she had not left of her own free will, Tony would take her back and do his noble best to forget Helen. If she had gone intentionally, a divorce could be arranged. If she were dead. . . . But what more could be done? The police had scoured the entire country, newspapers and radio had carried the story. It seemed hopeless. Yet, lost somewhere in the maze of Tony's brain was a vague feeling—a presentiment—that the mystery would be solved. It was more than that: he had a curious, hazy notion that if he could only *think,* he could find out the truth, himself. The idea was like a word on the tip of the tongue that cannot be uttered.

One night, Helen asked, "Darling—do you love me?"

It was a rhetorical question, of course. Tony had his arms around her and his face buried in her golden hair. He kissed her on the ear.

"As much as your first wife?"

"More! A thousand times more!"

"Sure?"

"Dead sure!"

"Oh," Helen sighed, "I'm so happy!"

"If only—" Tony began, speaking mostly to himself.

"What, dearest?"

IT WAS Lil on his mind again. If only he could *know!* And what was it that was nagging at his memory? Was there a clue in something she had left behind? But the police had seen and examined every—*the make-up box!* He had forgontten to show them that. In fact, he had forgotten its existence.

Dreamily, Helen was repeating, "What is it, darling?"

"Something I just remembered," said Tony, getting up. "I'll only be a second."

As he left the room, he saw Helen reflected in the big mirror over the fireplace—a golden vision, sheathed in pale green, lying back against the deep, burgundy velvet of the divan—a jewel. A sacred jewel.

Tony closed the bedroom door and struggled to the end of Lil's closet, behind all her hanging clothes. The case was still there. He brought it out and set it on the dressing table. In a drawer were some of Lil's hairpins. Tony bent one of them and went to work. Suppose that inside there was a piece of paper with an address—or some little personal belonging to point the way—

The lock flew open. Tony raised the cover and looked inside. The box was lined with heavy black silk and contained a polished crystal shaped like a hen's egg, that was held in the center of a curious setting—a six-pointed star of some dark metal. The lights on the dressing table struck through the crystal and lit the interior of the box with the colors of the rainbow.

Tony picked up the crystal egg and held it in his palm. It was very cool and surprisingly heavy. Then he saw that some

strange words were engraved in the metal underneath where the egg had been. He read them, speaking the syllables half-aloud. It was all very mysterious—but it was nonsense. Tony put the crystal back in the setting, closed and locked the case and returned it to the far corner of the closet. He had tried his best to recover Lil, even to opening the box that she had forbidden him to touch. This had been the last possible hope. Now he was free. He felt better going back to Helen.

Tony halted in the doorway. There was Lil, lying on the divan, her black hair shining against her white shoulders, her lithe body curving the gown of pale green. Tony's heart stopped.

Lil looked up, smiling, and held out her arms. "You've been gone so long, dearest —I thought you—"

Tony interrupted, his voice coming from he didn't know where. "For God's sake! Where have you been? How did you—and what is—and where's Helen?"

Lil stared. The words seemed to shock her for an instant. Then she jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing. "What have you been doing in there!" She took a step toward him and saw herself in the mirror.

Choking with rage, she whirled and cried, "You fool! I *told* you not to! Now see what you've done!"

A Vase from Araby

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

SHAPED like a tear-drop, pale as haze
Down where the mirage-cities stand,
Here is a blue enamel vase
Brought overseas from the fabled land.

Stoppered with turquoise, scribed around
With golden symbols that curve and flow
Like a guardian serpent, the flask is bound
In some secret spell of the long ago.

If curious fingers should break the seal
What would be found in its narrow hold:
Poisons to murder, or herbs to heal?
Attar of roses, or dust of gold?

Beware! . . . In a cloud as black as shame
Amazed eyes might see a Form appear,
With furious wings and hair of flame. . . .
The Djinni for ages imprisoned here!

SUPERSTITIONS

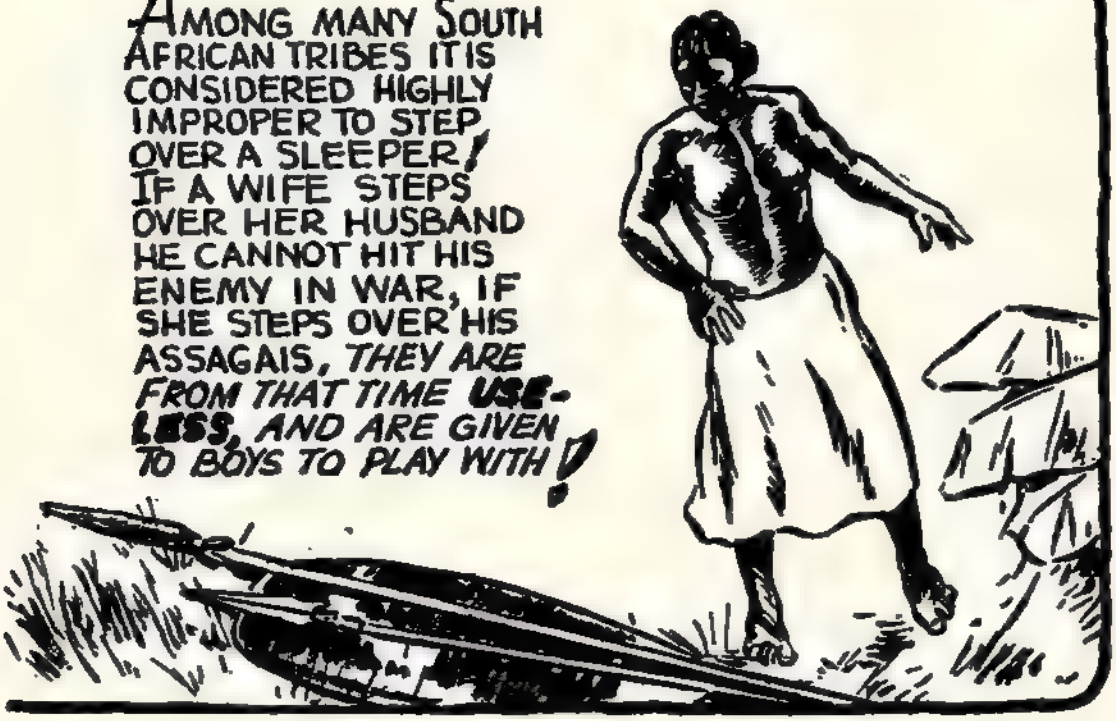
IT WAS **TABOO** FOR THE SPITTLE OF THE KING OF HAWAII TO FALL ANYWHERE EXCEPT WITHIN THE SPITTOON CARRIED BY A CHIEF OF THE FIRST RANK, WHO HELD THE DISTINGUISHED OFFICE OF **SPITTOON-BEARER!** HIS DUTY WAS TO FOLLOW THE KING ABOUT *AND TO* ***BURY THE CONTENTS BEYOND THE REACH OF THE MEDICINE MAN!***

AND TABOOS

by Hsill

IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND THE **SHOULDERBLADES OF SHEEP** WERE EMPLOYED IN DIVINATION, AND WERE CONSULTED AS TO FUTURE MARRIAGES, BIRTHS, DEATHS AND FUNERALS— BUT THE FORECASTS THUS MADE WERE BELIEVED NOT ACCURATE *UNLESS THE FLESH HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THE BONES WITHOUT THE USE OF ANY* ***IRON***!

AMONG MANY SOUTH AFRICAN TRIBES IT IS CONSIDERED HIGHLY IMPROPER TO STEP OVER A SLEEPER! IF A WIFE STEPS OVER HER HUSBAND HE CANNOT HIT HIS ENEMY IN WAR, IF SHE STEPS OVER HIS ASSAGAIS, *THEY ARE FROM THAT TIME* ***USELESS***, *AND ARE GIVEN TO BOYS TO PLAY WITH*!



Under Your Spell

By HENRY KUTTNER

WANTED: Assistant, experienced in magic field, for position in trick and novelty shop. Must be god. . . .

"GOD!" said Joseph Tinney explosively. "Good! Not god! Damn all linotypers anyway."

"Well," hedged the tall young man who had recently entered the Presto Trick Shop, "all I know is that I saw your ad in the *Times*, and I want a job."

Tinney rubbed his lean jaw. "Which is fair enough. I need an assistant, sure. But it isn't necessary to give me a spiel. Just—"

"You advertised for a god," the young man said stubbornly. "So you must hire me, not a mortal. Unless another god turns up, which isn't probable."

Tinney considered his fingernails. "What's your name?"

Want to gather yourself a fortune---or shoot a meteor at your landlord? Get to know Mr. Silver, the A. W. O. L. god from Mt. Olympus.

"Silver. Q. Silver."

"Q?"

"Uh—Quentin," said Mr. Silver, rather hastily. He was an extremely handsome young man, with curly golden hair, blue eyes, and a smile which, though pleasant, had in it an inexplicable suggestion of nastiness, as though at any moment he might break into a string of blasphemous oaths. He wore well-fitting tweeds, and certainly would appeal to the women customers. Not that there were many of those. Pranksters and magicians are usually men.

"How did you get in the store?" Tinney asked.

"Ah," Mr. Silver said thoughtfully. "Perhaps I transformed myself into a wisp of fog and blew through the keyhole. Still, that isn't likely, is it?"

"No," Tinney said. "Maybe you pulled

a Houdini? Let it go at that, anyway. It occurs to me that the *Times* isn't on the newsstands yet. How in hell did you run across my ad?"

"I get around," Mr. Silver remarked. "Now how about that job?"

The proprietor pondered. "Experienced—"

"In magic field. I wondered if you were being figurative. In my time I've often visited the Elysian Fields—by the way!" Mr. Silver broke off to say abruptly. "You don't believe me, do you?"

Tinney just looked at him.

There came a rattle at the door. Tinney opened it, to admit a short, plump man with a goatee and waxed mustache. "Professor Zeno!" he exclaimed. "Good morning. How did that bread-knife illusion work out?"

"Ha—satisfactorily," Professor Zeno grunted, toddling along the aisle and casting sharp glances at the stock. "Not spectacular enough, however. Need something new. *Big*—you know."

TINNEY hesitated. He had nothing on hand at the moment, for certain experiments were as yet unfinished. The illusion of the Skeleton Girl . . . no. Zeno wouldn't be satisfied with an incomplete job.

But before he could speak, Mr. Silver had deftly taken over. "I'm Mr. Tinney's new assistant, Professor. And we *do* have something to show you. Quite new in these parts. If you'll step this way—"

At this moment the door opened again, admitting a large man in a checked suit. He was holding a crumpled edition of the *Times* in one capable hand.

"Mr. Tinney!" he said, looking around at the three faces turned toward him. "I saw your ad—"

Tinney, about to remonstrate with Silver for butting in, saw a chance to even the score. "You want the job?" he asked. "Okay. You're hired."

"Wait," said Mr. Silver, and walked with singularly menacing lightness to where the large man stood. "Are you," he inquired, "a god?"

"No," he added. "I can see you're not. Tinney!" said Mr. Silver, swinging around to face the proprietor. "Are you going back on your printed word?"

Tinney glowered stubbornly. "I never hired you. Go chase yourself." He said something about screwballs.

The large man seemed to understand the situation. "Yeah," he added, glaring at Silver. "Beat it. Or you'll get thrown out."

Professor Zeno had been fondling his goatee in a confused fashion. "But I want an illusion!" he said plaintively. "This young man was about to show me—"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Silver smiled. "It's quite simple. I can demonstrate in a moment. You can build up the patter to suit yourself. The hand motions go like this. Then you say—" His words broke into unintelligible gibberish.

HE FINISHED by pointing at the large man in the checked suit. Instantly a jagged streak of lightning flamed out of nowhere. It went away, taking the large man with it.

On the floor was a fairly large heap of whitish ash.

There was silence.

Professor Zeno said, "No props?"

"Just what I showed you."

"Ah. Excellent. Luckily, I know Greek, so I can repeat your—ah—incantation. Now bring the man back. A trapdoor?"

Mr. Silver smiled flashingly. "Oh, I can't bring him back. He's been destroyed."

It is interesting that Tinney believed him without question.

Professor Zeno, however, did not. He chuckled, played with his goatee, and peered at the ceiling. Nothing. He got

down on his hands and knees to scrutinize the floor. Still no results.

Thunder rolled, distantly. Tinney, who had been staring at Mr. Silver, saw the young man's eyes widen. Silver cast an almost frightened glance toward the door.

Then he vanished.

A large white rabbit appeared near the crouching figure of Professor Zeno. The latter, in his crawling investigations, slowly swiveled around till he was nose to twitching whisker with the rabbit. For a space the two remained there, eyeing each other.

"Part of the trick?" Professor Zeno asked. The sound of thunder had died.

"No," said the rabbit. "Sometimes I get tired of my own shape, that's all."

"May I compliment you on your ventriloquistic abilities?" the Professor inquired.

"You may," said the rabbit, "if you're that dumb."

Zeno clambered to his feet. "I want to go over that lightning illusion with you again," he said. "The back room? Where are you, anyway?"

"Oh, come along," said the rabbit impatiently, and hopped along the aisle. Professor Zeno followed, casting occasional glances behind the counter.

The pair vanished through black curtains, leaving Joseph Tinney inexplicably worried.

BEFORE he could follow, a small boy entered to purchase a box of itching powder. Tinney rang up the amount and leaned against the cash register, brooding. Insolence he could not tolerate. His employees—well, after all, they *were* employees. And this brash young chap was taking altogether too much for granted.

Tinney remembered the lighting bolt, and unaccountably shivered. As a magician of many years' standing, he should have been able to explain away the illusion. Yet—

He walked to the pile of ash on the floor and stirred it up with his foot. Something gilt and gleaming emerged. A collar button.

Professor Zeno came from the back of the store, looking white and ill. He brushed hastily past Tinney, who said, "Is something wrong? Can I—"

"Your assistant," Zeno whispered. "I know who he is. Why did you do it, Tinney?"

"Do what?"

"*You* know," said the magician accusingly. "How much did he give you for it?"

Tinney took a deep breath. "For what?"

"Your soul," Zeno said in a hushed voice, and fled as though Mr. Silver pursued him.

The silence was broken only by the occasional growl of motors and the squawk of horns from the street outside. Tinney pursed his lips and squinted at nothing. Odd. Zeno was a pretty hard-headed chap. It'd take a good deal to throw him into a panic. . . .

A battle-axe of a woman, carrying a campstool and a portable phonograph, halted in the doorway to stare at Tinney. Automatically he stepped back, but she came no farther.

"Yes, madam?"

"I," said the battle-axe, "have a message for you." With incredible deftness she opened the camp-stool, set the phonograph on it, and started a record. Tinney blinked rather dazedly. Words came, rather raspingly, as though the unknown speaker had a cold.

"The end of the world is coming," said the phonograph. "Sister Seelah brings you warning! Verily I say to you, you are evil—"

Tinney winced. A crowd, he noticed, was gathering. The electrician who had the shop next door slipped to his side.

"She's been hanging around my place, bothering the customers," he muttered. "Nuisance! I know her—a crook. She bothers you till you give her five bucks to go away."

The battle-axe's eyes were gleaming. She adjusted the volume of the phonograph till it rasped distressingly on Tinney's eardrums.

"You are evil! Hearken to me—"

"Look," said Tinney plaintively, "please go away. Here's a dollar. I've got a headache, and that thing's making it worse."

"Can you save your soul with a dollar?" the battle-axe inquired.

"I had to give her twenty," the electrician whispered.

At that precise moment the tone of the phonograph changed. So did the import of the message that was pouring from it.

"Repent," it said, "and—oh, the hell with it. That reminds me of a limerick. There was a young man from Nantucket—"

It wasn't a very nice limerick. But the one that came next was definitely unfit for women and children. The battle-axe stood glaring at the machine, frozen with amazement, as it continued in a hoarsely raucous screech:

"Gather 'round, everybody! I come here to offer you a bargain—a tremendous bargain! Get your French postcards here! Three for a dollar!"

It went on . . . getting no better.

THE battle-axe concentrated her fury on Tinney. She moved toward him, fingers curved into talons; but just then a tall figure interposed itself between the woman and her prospective victim. It was Mr. Silver, his pleasant smile now definitely nasty.

"I think I see a policeman," he remarked. "Yes, I do. Here he comes. You know, madam, it's really unwise to sell—er—to sell such goods in the street. Our local laws—"

The woman sent one glance toward the oncoming blue-coated figure, and fled, leaving her phonograph behind. Oddly enough, the record instantly resumed its original tenor, dilating upon the evil of the world.

Tinney felt himself drawn back into his store. "So true," Mr. Silver remarked. "It's an evil world. But an interesting one. I've had remarkable adventures here, in my time. One thing, I never got bored on earth. Whereas an eternity spent running messages for—"

"For?"

"Jove!" Mr. Silver exclaimed, abruptly changing the subject. "I almost forgot. Professor Zeno gave me a check. Five hundred dollars for the illusion."

"Too cheap," said Tinney, his trading instinct automatically coming to the fore. "That trick's worth a couple of grand."

"Well," Mr. Silver inquired. "That's what he paid, isn't it?"

Tinney, who already had taken the check, glanced at it again. His eyes must be going back on him. It no longer said "Exactly Five Hundred Dollars and No Cents." Instead, it was made out in the amount of two thousand bucks.

Tinney licked his lips. He looked very closely at Mr. Silver's face, noting the disarming frankness of the blue eyes and the hidden qualities of that deceptive smile.

"Are you the devil?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"Which one?" Mr. Silver inquired. "In any case, no. I'm neither Belphegor nor Satan nor Hel nor Baal nor—well, I told you I was a god, didn't I? That's perfectly true. Ymir—I'm no devil!"

Tinney went back of the counter and drank whiskey. He reappeared feeling logical and argumentative. "That rabbit—" he hazarded.

"*You* know," Mr. Silver countered cryptically.

"I know—nothing! You're a clever trickster. So what?"

"Humans were always skeptical. Even Danae, I heard—though not for long. It's difficult to convince a human. If I appeared to you in my rightful form, you'd die of it. Too drastic—and it wouldn't fit in with my plans."

"Your plans?"

Mr. Silver sat on the counter and swung his tweed-sheathed legs. He smiled.

"Well, I'm bored. I'm supposed to be indispensable in Olympus, but that's not true. It's been long since I visited your planet. There was always excitement here. And other inducements." A gleam showed for an instant in Mr. Silver's candid blue eyes. "Let that pass. I'm incognito here, so it will be best for me to assume a normal place in your world. What better place is there than a magician's assistant for Mer—for me?"

"No," Tinney said. "No! It's too fantastic. Alice in Wonderland stuff. This is New York, not Egypt or Babylon. Gods. . . . It's like that clock coming to life and talking about politics." He pointed to the big- old-fashioned timepiece on the wall.

"What," inquired the clock suddenly, "is more interesting than politics, anyway? It charts the course of the world. If you had as much time on your hands as I have—"

"Humh!" Tinney cried with inarticulate abruptness. The clock resumed its familiar ticking. Mr. Silver smiled.

Presently Tinney found speech again. "Did it?" he asked.

"It did. Magic is contagious. History proves that. Once a bit of enchantment creeps into the world of yours, it acts as a magnet, so to speak. In Ilium, Chryses started the trouble when he asked Apollo to wreak vengeance on the Greeks. Briseis got help from Jupiter, and of course Juno stuck her nose in. After that all the gods and goddesses were sucked in, with all sorts of minor magics. I'm running on. . . . My point is that magic attracts magic. Your trickery is a low-grade form, of course —legerdemain chiefly. But it makes use of the basic principles of magic—bluff, for example. You're nothing new in the scheme of things; the ancient priest was your prototype. Priests and gods have much in common."

Tinney shut his eyes. After a while he said, "It's good patter. But not quite good enough. You're no god. Are you going to leave quietly, or shall I phone the police?"

Mr. Silver ruffled his golden curls. "Seldom have I met such a skeptic. Oh, well. There are ways of convincing even . . . Get out."

"Eh?"

"I said get out. Go away. I'll take care of the store while you're gone; I'm smart enough for that. When you're ready to admit that I'm a god, come back."

"Listen!" said Tinney—

TO THE threshold of his store entrance. He was outside. How he had got there, standing on the sidewalk, he had not the slightest idea. But there he was, thinking mad thoughts about hypnotism.

"Magician!" said Mr. Silver bitterly from the interior. "Be one, then—the passive type. And come back when you're wiser."

Tinney's nostrils twitched. He took a step forward, and halted. Some invisible barrier barred his path. He could not re-enter his own shop.

Rot! He was imagining things. And yet the glassy wall inexplicably remained. Tinney slid his palms along it. From the rear, it seemed as though the man was making mystic passes in the air.

"Pardon!" a florid, paunchy man said, and pushed past Tinney, who caught the other's arm. "Eh?"

"You—you can't go in."

"Pickets!" said the paunchy man. "Well, you look hungry. Here's a quarter." And he walked into the store, leaving Tinney in no very happy frame of mind.

He made another attempt to get past the barrier, but of course failed. Thoughtfully he slid the quarter in his pocket. There *were* laws. . . . Magic, indeed! He hailed a passing bluecoat.

"Morning, Flanagan."

"Mornin', Mister Tinney. A nice one, too."

Good! This was it. Flanagan was big enough to throw Mr. Silver bodily out of the shop. He'd do it, too.

"Wait a bit," Tinney said. "I need your help."

"Ah? Sure. What can I do for you?"

"Diddle, diddle dumpling," Tinney explained—

"Eh?"

"My son John—"

"I don't get it."

"Went to bed—"

"Sure," Flanagan soothed. "Feelin' good, ain't you? Well, no harm in that. Now I must be on my way."

"With his stockings on!" screamed the harassed Joseph Tinney, and stood staring. What the devil . . . he hadn't meant to recite that imbecile nursery rhyme. He'd meant to tell Flanagan about Mr. Silver. But somehow the doggerel had popped out of his mouth of its own volition.

"Flanagan!" Tinney cried desperately.

The officer turned back, one eyebrow lifted. "Sor?"

"For heaven's sake, listen to me!"

"I'm listening," Flanagan said patiently. "What?"

"Higgeldy, piggeldy, my black hen; she lays eggs for gentlemen!"

"It was a red hen, the way I learned it," Flanagan murmured. "Now why don't you go back in your store and take it easy for a bit? Lie down or something?"

"That's just it!" Tinney gasped. "I—I can't—"

"Can't what?"

"A tisket, a tasket—"

There seemed little point in pursuing such an incoherent conversation. Even Tinney saw that. With a groan he turned and made one more attempt to reenter his store. Useless. Mr. Silver was selling the paunchy customer a dozen dribble glasses, he saw.

MAYBE Silver was a crook. Maybe he intended to rob the till. Tinney grinned tightly. He'd gone to the bank yesterday, so there wasn't much petty cash on hand. Not enough to matter. Just the same—

Just the same, Tinney decided he needed a drink. With a glazed look in his eyes, he tottered to the nearest corner, where he glimpsed a cocktail bar, chrome and glass. It was the visual equivalent of a Mickey Finn, but Tinney saw only an oasis in a mad Sahara. He entered, and, at the bar, saw a familiar figure—Luciferno the Great, a man who looked exactly like the devil.

"Hiya, Tinney," said Luciferno. "Come over and have a drink."

"Thanks, Lu. Whiskey. Beer chaser. Thanks. . . ."

"Your hands," Luciferno remarked, "are trembling. Hangover, nerves, or ghosts?"

"The last. I'm in trouble."

"So?" The saturnine eyebrows lifted. "What's wrong?"

"Diddle diddle—nothing!" Tinney said violently. "Nothing at all." He gulped whiskey, wondering why he couldn't tell either Flanagan or Luciferno what had happened. Hypnotic suggestion. Yeah. That was it. On an impulse he pulled pencil and an old envelope from his pocket and began to scribble on it.

What he wanted to say was, "I've been hypnotized. Help! A man named Silver won't let me into my store."

What he wrote was, "Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been—"

Tinney crumpled the envelope and reached for his beer. Then he hesitated, seeking the bartender with his eyes. That worthy, a largish man with a bristling mustache, wandered over.

"Sir?"

"Er . . . there seems to be a fish in my beer."

"Sir?"

"A goldfish," Tinney amplified. "It's swimming around. See?"

"Now that is clever," Luciferno commented. "Not new, of course, but you managed it deftly. Barman!" he added in a loud voice. "There's a snake in *my* beer."

So there was. A small garter snake was coiled in Luciferno's goblet, its wedge head raised, regarding the world with dim malevolence.

"Don't!" Tinney pleaded softly. "This isn't a gag. I can't help it."

"He's enchanted!" cried Luciferno, always a publicity hound. "Or it's the beer. Look! Another fish!"

It was true. Two small goldfish were swimming contentedly in Tinney's goblet. The beer, by some odd legerdemain, had apparently turned into crystal-clear water.

"Look," said the barman. "This is bad for business. Are you guys going to lay off?"

At that moment a fountaining spray of water geysered up from Tinney's goblet and splashed against the ceiling. The extraordinary fountain continued to play. The bartender cursed luridly, seized the glass, and lifted it. Instantly streams of water shot from the horrified man's ears.

"A stooge!" Luciferno accused. "That's not fair."

"Will you shut up?" the wretched Tinney groaned. "I'm getting out of here!" He sprang from his stool, seized his hat, and jammed it down on his head. Immediately he lifted it again to shake out three field-mice and an eel. That done, he took a hurried departure.

LUCIFERNO trailed him. "Hey, I want to see you. I need some new equipment. By the looks of things, you've been brushing up on your tricks."

"Lu, for Pete's sake, not now! I—I—diddle diddle—" Tinney abruptly fell silent.

Luciferno stared. "You're drunk? On one boiler-maker?"

"I just hired a new assistant," Tinney managed to get out without difficulty. "He's good. Why not drop into the store and see him? I—I've got an engagement." He left the magician staring after him, and hailed a taxi.

"The Parkway," he said at random. And relaxed on the cushions, pondering.

Of course it was obvious that Mr. Silver wasn't human. Tinney had realized that long ago. But to admit the fact, even to himself, was extremely difficult. It would automatically mean admitting a lot of other things. The stability of life would vanish. *Anything* might happen. . . .

Tinney was arguing against himself. Psychologically, he was on the spot. He didn't dare believe in Mr. Silver's abnormal powers. But he couldn't disbelieve, either. A god!

With a violent effort Tinney turned his mind into coldly logical channels. He didn't believe in the Philosopher's Stone, either, but he admitted the possibility of its existence. Transmutation of elements could be achieved in the laboratory. Cyclotrons . . . atomic bombardment . . . yeah. Science had an answer.

If only such an answer existed to explain Mr. Silver!

Perhaps it did. Magic was—what?—contagious; legerdemain was based on the elementary principles of goety. A kindergarten, as it were. A six-year-old child

would be baffled by calculus. A cosine on the triangle's rim, a simple line would seem to him. . . . Tinney shut his eyes tightly. He was veering.

Legerdemain is to genuine magic as addition, say, is to calculus. Similar ratio. Grant that. Okay. Well, then—

Mr. Silver was familiar with advanced magic. The Greeks had a word for it. Tinney found himself wishing he was an ancient Greek. One of Hellene's babies. . . . Curious reaction he had to this business. His usually staid and logical mind was spinning off at wild tangents. He forced himself to relax.

But—the thought was jolting—a god would have almost unlimited powers! Mr. Silver had already proved his unusual abilities. Suppose they could be turned to practical ends?

That logical thought gave Tinney the rational basis he had been seeking. He forgot the impossibility of his thesis in pondering the incredible possibilities. Only they weren't incredible. They were . . . *hm!*

TINNEY lit a cigarette with shaking hands. He was remembering his lease. It still had four years to run, and was a definite handicap to him. He needed larger quarters. The landlord would not compromise. There was no possibility of subleasing. Suppose, now, a fire gutted the shop . . . nothing incendiary, of course. Nothing that would interest the insurance company unduly. A—a meteor!

It was a slightly staggering thought. But why wouldn't Mr. Silver be able to control meteors? If he could—and would—one troubling problem would be solved. The chief difficulty would be the necessity of handling Mr. Silver with unerring tact.

The possibilities were unlimited.

Tinney leaned forward. "Take me back to Times Square," he commended. "And hurry!"

Mr. Silver was alone in the store. This time Tinney found no difficulty in passing the threshold. The handsome young man looked up and smiled.

"Ah," he said. "Changed your mind, I see. Good!"

Tinney looked around. "We're alone?"

Mr. Silver perched himself on a counter and swung his legs. There was a curiously cryptic smile on his lips. "I see," he said. "Trust a mortal . . . you've figured out a way to profit by my appearance. Greed is always convincing. A man believes what he wants to believe. You know, Tinney, if a human could only forget self—his ego—permanently, he'd be a god. That's the big difference."

Tinney lit a cigarette and examined the till. There was quite a lot of money in it.

"Made many sales?"

"A few. Stop beating around the bush. What do you want from me?"

"Well—"

Silver smoothed back his curly golden locks. "Why be ashamed of the bargaining instinct? It's a prerogative of humans. You can be helpful to me, Tinney. When a god visits earth, he's subject to certain three-dimensional strictures. His powers are limited. Thus human contacts are helpful to him. Half the fun of—*this*—is pretending to live as an ordinary man. I get a kick out of it," he added. "Eating the sort of food you do, following your crazy life-patterns . . . one of which involves making a living."

Tinney hesitated. "Making a living?"

"Part of the game. I could easily create gold—but that would be cheating. When you play a game, you handicap yourself by following its rules, don't you? Well—I'm playing at being human. It's fun."

"But you have—certain powers?"

"Sure. And I'll use them, as long as I don't break the rules by doing so. Now let's have it. I'm willing to help you. A fair bargain. D'you want money?"

Somehow Tinney could not grasp the thought of a million dollars being dumped in his lap. It was like trying to comprehend astronomical terms. He explained about the lease.

"Meteor, eh?" Silver said, and vanished. In a moment he was back, grinning.

"Fair enough. There's a small one not far away. I can guide it down here . . . let's see. You own a house in Jersey, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"I advise you, then, to let the meteor destroy it."

"You're—you don't understand!" Tinney objected. "It's this lease—"

"I know," Silver murmured. "I'm just giving you good advice. If you don't want to take it, suit yourself."

"You'll bring the meteor down here? And make sure the shop's burned completely? And—I don't want anybody killed."

"A laudable thought," Mr. Silver remarked. "No one will be killed. One final warning, Tinney. Don't try to double-cross me."

"Of course I won't try," Tinney said virtuously.

The other's sardonic eyes dwelt on him. "That's well. You see, the gods seldom exact personal vengeance, but there's an unpleasant sort of justice that takes over in such cases. An automatic adjustment, more or less. Often mortals have tried to get the best of the gods. Please don't do that, Tinney."

"I wouldn't think of it."

"Sorry I put the idea into your head," Mr. Silver said. "Let's get out of here before the meteor strikes."

AS THEY reached the door, there was a whistling crash. The crash kept reechoing; the whistle kept shrilling in Tinney's head. His eyes, he discovered, were closed.

He opened them. He was staring up at a white ceiling.

His skull ached. What the devil had happened?

"Sorry," said a familiar voice. Mr. Silver appeared. "A falling tile hit you. I couldn't guard against accidents. But nobody died."

Tinney licked his lips. "W-what happened?"

"What you wanted. The meteor struck. Here!" Silver said, thrusting a folded newspaper into Tinney's hands. "I have work to do. See you later."

He vanished. Tinney read the paper. Exultation filled him.

The shop had been gutted. That automatically canceled his lease. As Silver had said, no one had been seriously hurt by the accident. The meteor itself had crashed into an adjoining shop, and the resultant fire had gutted half a city block. The entire property had been owned by the same man, Jonas Kidder.

"Good!" said Tinney, who didn't like Mr. Kidder. Then his jaw dropped as he read on.

The meteor had contained diamonds. Not many, but they were large ones, and for the most part nearly perfect. An unusual happenstance. Yet scientists admitted that there was no reason why diamonds shouldn't exist in a meteorite.

Since the object had fallen on Kidder's property, he profited accordingly. He had become even more wealthy than before. . . .

"Oh, damn!" Tinney gasped. His triumph had turned to ashes. Why hadn't he taken Silver's advice? If the meteorite had fallen on his new Jersey property, he'd be a rich man now. Why hadn't Silver been more explicit?

Obviously because the gods liked their little jests. Their weakness in that respect was notorious. Tinney closed his eyes and considered.

Next time . . . next time! This wasn't a fairy tale in which you had a limited num-

ber of wishes. Mr. Silver was presumably ready and willing to assist Tinney in various profitable ways. If the god could bring down a meteorite from the sky, he could certainly perform equally potent miracles.

Then—

Money. That was the answer, of course. Tinney found a button and summoned the nurse. He learned that he could leave the hospital within a few days. . . .

In the meantime, Mr. Silver appeared.

"The insurance has gone through okay," he remarked. "I'm handling the business for you, by proxy."

"I didn't sign a proxy—"

"Well, your signature's on it. What are your plans now? Going to open another shop?"

"Look," Tinney said, "I want to get some money."

"There's insurance money."

"I mean—an inexhaustible purse, or something like that. Can you—"

Mr. Silver nodded and vanished. He reappeared to thrust a leather wallet into Tinney's hands.

"This is what you want, I think. Unzip it."

Tinney obeyed. He took out ten twenty-dollar bills.

"Now close it. Good. Open it again."

Tinney extricated ten more bills of the same denomination. He looked up inquiringly.

Mr. Silver shrugged. "An old trick. The cornucopia formula. The inexhaustible purse isn't new by any means. Each time you open that wallet, there'll be two hundred bucks in it. A good round sum, two hundred bucks."

TINNEY tried it again. And again. And yet again. It worked, all right. There was a thousand dollars in his lap. Struck by a thought, he compared the serial numbers of the bills.

"*That's* all right," Mr. Silver smiled. "They're legal tender."

"But where do they come from? They're not new—"

"Treasure trove. We have power over all dark places. Wherever money is hidden in the dark, our hands can reach it. This batch, for example, came from the cache of an old miser in the—um—the Panamint Mountains in California."

"But it's stolen!"

Mr. Silver didn't answer. There was a mocking gleam in his blue eyes. Tinney flushed and glanced away.

"So you'll keep the wallet, of course," Mr. Silver said. "Fair enough. Now let's make plans."

"Plans? I—"

"You don't want to open another store, do you?"

"Lord, no!" Tinney exclaimed. "I'm sick of that. I—I think I'll retire."

"Not yet you won't," Mr. Silver told him. "I want to see the world. Take part in life, as it were. You're going to become a practicing magician, Tinney."

"Uh?"

"Like Houdini and those boys. Tinney the Great. You'll tour the country. I'll act as your assistant."

"But I'm not a magician," Tinney expostulated. "I can't do a thing like that."

"Leave it to me," Silver smiled. "All you'll have to do is follow my orders, and —there'll be magic."

"Now wait a minute. I don't like the idea at all. I don't want to travel. I—"

"You're an ungrateful so-and-so, aren't you?" Mr. Silver inquired. "I've made you wealthy. You can live in luxury for the rest of your life. All I ask is your cooperation for—say—two years. After that I'll have had enough of earth for a while, and I'll push off. You won't see me again. You can settle back and enjoy your ill-gotten spoils."

Tinney pulled at his lower lip. "But—"

"It seems a fair bargain to me. But if

you prefer, I'll take back the wallet and try someone else. Eh?"

"No!" Tinney said sharply. "I'll do it. Of course I'll do it."

Mr. Silver smiled once more, rather sardonically. "One deals with the lower orders on their own ground," he remarked cryptically. "Well, I fly. There's much to be done. See you presently."

He vanished. Tinney lay back and considered, clutching the wallet greedily. Two years of road shows . . . *um*. It might be worse. Not the sort of life he enjoyed, but—

Mr. Silver was busy. The next day traffic in Times Square was halted by a curious phenomenon. Above the pedestrian island in the center of the street, slightly north of the subway kiosk near the Times Building, a human form was observed floating in midair. A female human form. A strikingly pretty one, in an intriguing bathing suit. It was difficult to tell whether she was alive or dead for her eyes were closed, and she floated, face down, twenty-five feet above street level.

Great interest was aroused.

A FIRE-TRUCK was summoned, and the ladder swung upright. The body of the girl floated up, beyond the reach of the topmost fireman. When the truck had departed, the girl descended to her former level.

There she stayed, with occasional excursions into the upper atmosphere. The Mayor came down and was photographed. A cowboy from Madison Square Garden tried to lassoo the floating girl. There was little work done in the offices adjoining Times Square. There were more people outside the Paramount Theater than there were inside the building.

Matters remained static until nightfall, when the girl abruptly vanished. In her place a shower of leaflets came fluttering down. They read:

TINNEY THE GREAT IS COMING!

The World's Greatest Greatest Magician
Will Soon Appear in New York!

BE READY!

IT IS regrettable that already Joseph Tinney was considering the safest and best method of double-crossing Mr. Silver. Nothing crude, of course. And definitely nothing dangerous. The thing was, Tinney didn't want to waste the next two years playing vaudeville circuits.

It seemed a small matter, and no doubt was. But Tinney was avariciously anxious to employ his new-found fortune in ways best known to himself. Hedonistic by nature, he nevertheless would not willingly have caused pain to another—unless it seemed necessary.

In this case, it seemed necessary. Why waste two years? More than forty of them had been wasted already in hard work. Tinney wanted to take his inexhaustible fortune and raise hell. He wanted to go to South America—Rio, Buenos Aires, and other locations publicized by Don Ameche. He wanted—lots of things.

He wanted them now!

"But," his more sensible self argued, "why take a chance? Two years isn't so long. And when the time's up, you'll be completely free. Mr. Silver said so."

"Damn Mr. Silver," was the inaudible response. "Why should I play nursemaid to him for the next two years?"

"A bargain's a bargain."

"It didn't cost Silver anything, did it? If I were a god, I'd have something better to do than travel around the country on the vaudeville circuit."

"But you can have plenty of fun while you do."

"I wouldn't feel safe," Tinney argued passionately. "You know how gods are. Capricious. He might take it into his head to do—anything!"

"So you're going to get the jump on him, eh? Louse."

"Shut up!" Tinney commanded, and was obeyed. He turned his thoughts to the immediate problem. Getting rid of Mr. Silver.

It didn't sound easy, and was harder than it sounded. You couldn't sprinkle holy water on the man. You couldn't shoot him with a silver bullet. Well, he wasn't a man—or a demon. He was a god.

Tinney brooded.

He had found no answer several days later, when Mr. Silver informed him that a huge New York theater had been rented for the initial performance.

"Rented?"

"I used argument," Silver smiled. "After all, you're a big name in New York now. I've been giving you a great deal of publicity."

"I know," Tinney grunted. "I saw the papers. An elephant on top of the Empire State, for heaven's sake! What a thing to do!"

"Oh, it wasn't a real elephant. And it was marvelous publicity."

They were in the uptown apartment Silver had rented for the two of them. Gray light slanted in through the tall windows. A storm was approaching.

Silver cast a vaguely apprehensive glance around. "You remember your lines? And the action?"

"Sure. But—"

"Then you'll be at the theater tonight. Don't forget the time. I'll meet you there."

"What's the rush?" Tinney asked, but got no answer. Mr. Silver had vanished. He evinced a curious fear of thunderstorms, Tinney decided. He began to wonder why, but was distracted by the buzzing of the house phone.

IT WAS Luciferno the Great. He said, "Hi, Tinney. I'm coming up—" and the phone went dead. Soon afterward, the gaunt, diabolic-looking man appeared at the door, grinned at Tinney, and collapsed in the nearest chair.

"Had a hard night. I was trying to keep Zeno sober. Got a drink?"

Tinney went to the sideboard and mixed highballs. "Zeno? Is he on a tear?"

"Yeah," said Luciferno slowly. "Funny. He hardly ever touched the stuff. . . . If I didn't know him better, I'd say he was crazy. He kept telling me that you'd—um—sold your soul to the devil."

Tinney laughed falsely. "Imagine that!"

"I'd rather not," Luciferno said, tugging at his goatee. "I just dropped over to wish you luck in your debut tonight. You joined the Union, didn't you?"

"Sure." Mr. Silver had attended to that detail.

"You've been hiding your light under a bushel, Tinney. The publicity you've been knocking out lately—it's good. I wish you'd sold me some of those illusions before you gave up your shop."

"Oh, well," Tinney said vaguely. "I had to save a few for myself."

"Um." Luciferno had something on his mind. That was obvious. Finally he put down his drink and leaned forward.

"I'm a magician," he said quietly. "I work with illusions. Tricks, if you like. Real magic doesn't exist. All my life I've known that."

Tinney glanced away. "True."

"But I *have* wondered, sometimes, if—hell!" Luciferno said sharply. "You know, Zeno got me going last night. We were both pretty tight. And—who is this man Silver, anyway?"

Before Tinney could answer, the buzzer warned him of someone at the door. He rose with relieved alacrity and admitted the newcomer. It was Professor Zeno.

The little man was still drunk. He bounced into the room like a rubber ball, glared at Tinney, and swung toward Luciferno. "Well?" he snapped. "I'm glad

to see you're safe. I got worried about what *he* might do to you, alone up here."

"Good Lord, man," Luciferno pacified, and grinned at Tinney. "Zeno got me to come up here and see you. He was waiting in the lobby. . . . For my money, somebody's acting a little crazy. But I don't know who."

Zeno went uninvited to the sideboard and poured himself a stiff hooker. "Okay," he said, turning. "Ask Tinney. Just ask him. Ask him who that—that horror Silver is!"

"Who's that horror Silver?" Luciferno asked obediently.

Tinney sat down and recovered his highball. "He's not the devil, anyhow."

Zeno gulped brandy and shuddered. "You're a liar. He—he worked magic for me in the back room of your shop. Pretty nasty magic. He wasn't faking."

Luciferno sighed. "An old-timer like you being taken in by smart patter," he remonstrated. "I'm surprised."

Tinney said suddenly, "He isn't human—Silver, I mean. Zeno's right."

THERE was a dead silence. Tinney went on, watching his glass: "He's not the devil. He's a—a god."

Luciferno was having trouble with his highball. Zeno watched Tinney with round, slightly glazed eyes.

"Spill it," Luciferno said. "I'm going around in circles. You and Zeno—let's have it!"

Tinney obeyed. He told them what had happened. Not everything, though. He omitted a few significant items—such as the inexhaustible wallet.

When he had finished, the long silence grew longer. Zeno was the first to break it.

"Devil or god, he's not anything that belongs in this world. You've got to—to exorcise him!"

Tinney's smile was lop-sided. "Just like that, eh? D'you think I want to have him around?"

LUCIFERNO said carefully, "I don't admit that I'm convinced, of course. But working on the assumption—the perfectly insane assumption—that Silver *is* a god, it's obvious that something has got to be done. I spent years learning my trade. I can make an elephant disappear from the stage—and I get paid plenty for things like that. Now suppose this guy Silver can wave his hand and make—hell, make a whole theater disappear! It's unfair competition."

"Eh?" Tinney didn't quite comprehend.

"Suppose you were a miner," Luciferno explained. "You made a living digging gold out of the ground. Somebody comes along with the Philosopher's Stone and says he can transform anything into gold. Unfair competition. Nobody'd pay you to work in a mine if gold could be got out of empty air. Magic can create far more spectacular effects than stage-craft. I can't compete with a god. Neither can Zeno. It—why, audiences simply won't pay to see us. We'll be penny-ante stuff to them. They'll want the real thing—your friend Silver."

Tinney hadn't considered that aspect of the situation. Personally, he didn't give a damn. But the problem seemed sufficiently important to Luciferno and Zeno.

"It isn't my fault," he said at last. "I'm just as anxious to get rid of Silver as you are. I didn't want to become a magician."

"Can't we pay him off?"

"He's a god," Tinney reminded the other.

"True. He wouldn't need money. . . . What about threats?"

"He's a god," Tinney repeated. "Dangerous—you know!"

Zeno shivered. "It's against nature. He's a menace to civilization."

Luciferno finished his highball. "I don't

know why I'm discussing this crazy business seriously. But I've got to protect my business."

Tinney veiled his eyes as he considered a new thought. "What you said about threats—"

"Eh?"

"Silver told me that he's handicaped by his human form. He's more or less subject to natural laws."

Zeno's round face was flushed. "He wouldn't listen to threats."

"That's just it. The—the creature's a menace. We'll be justified in acting to protect ourselves. Lu, your floating basket illusion—"

"I know. What about it?"

"You use a stooge inside the basket—and then stick swords through the wicker. Suppose you didn't use a stooge. Suppose—Silver—"

"That's murder!" Curiously enough, it was Zeno who spoke.

"Murder?" Tinney glared at him. "You're the guy who's been yelling about devils. Is it murder to liquidate a devil?"

"I—"

Luciferno stood up. "Zeno, we don't want Silver coming in while we're talking. Go down to the lobby and stand guard. If you see him, phone up here. Quick!"

THE note of command in his voice was conclusive. Zeno, after a worried glance around, departed. Luciferno mixed a strong highball and smiled at Tinney.

"Now we can talk."

"Silver can appear out of the air, Lu. It's no use having Zeno stand guard downstairs."

"I know. I just wanted to get him out of the way. Why are you so willing to give up a theater tour that'll mean big dough? You're not in the chips."

"I'm afraid of Silver."

Luciferno gulped whiskey-and-soda and leaned back. "I'll wait till you're ready to tell me. Here's the angle, Tinney. I'll help you get rid of Silver. But—what's in it for me?"

Tinney thought quickly. "Five thousand bucks."

"Ten."

"Ten."

"You agreed too quickly," Luciferno chuckled. "You've got dough—big dough. You got it from Silver, eh? I thought so! Now spill the dirt!"

But Tinney stubbornly refused to tell Luciferno about the wallet. They compromised, finally, with an exchange of fifty thousand dollars. Tinney simply retired to his bathroom and pulled currency out of his wallet till he had the required sum.

The plans were made at last, and Zeno called back upstairs. But the little man refused to have any part in the business. He advocated calling a priest. He was afraid of Mr. Silver. He didn't mind admitting it. He boasted of the fact. It proved that he was a damn sight more sensible than his colleagues, he said . . .

Luciferno and Tinney let him go, toasted each other with a final highball, and parted. Both were well satisfied.

There would be no question of murder. Not without a *corpus delicti*. Luciferno, being a master of stage magic, could easily arrange for the hiding and ultimate disposal of Silver's corpse. And Tinney . . .

He would not have embarked on the plan had he not considered it completely safe. Suppose Luciferno failed? Tinney would blandly disavow any knowledge of the other magician's murderous intentions. Luciferno had acted on his own initiative, and surely Tinney wasn't to blame for that! Besides, Luciferno could always contend—if he failed—that he hadn't planned to injure Silver. The sword had slipped, that was all.

There were plenty of outs.

Tinney drank another highball and got ready for the show.

Before he left, Luciferno telephoned.

"Been thinking. Swords, you know. . . . We can't afford to take any chances. I've got a better gag."

Tinney himself had been a little worried about whether or not cold steel could injure Silver. "Yeah? What?"

"A metal cabinet—the X-13 model. I'll challenge Silver to get himself out of it. He'll get inside, and the moment the door's shut, everything will be over. He'll be incinerated."

"Thermite?"

"Something like it. There'll be no trace. We'll open the cabinet, admit that Silver managed to escape—and there'll be no kickback. All right?"

"Perfect," Tinney agreed. . . .

IT WAS a sell-out at the theater. S. R. O. signs gladdened the manager's heart. Park Avenue had turned out *en masse*. Broadway Rose circulated in the lobby. Everybody from Walter Winchell to Alex Woolcott was in evidence. The Little Flower showed up, hoping, perhaps, for a fire. A big night.

It was to be far bigger than anyone realized.

Joseph Tinney, resplendent in white tie and tails, sat in his dressing-room and from time to time discussed a bottle of Scotch he had thoughtfully brought with him. For the twenty-second time the manager popped in, scrabbling at his hair.

"Mr. Tinney! The props haven't come yet."

"Forget it."

"But you need props! And where's your troupe? I—"

"It's my show, isn't it?" Tinney snapped.

"It's my theater! If anything goes wrong—"

"Nothing will go wrong," said Mr. Silver blandly as he pushed open the door. "Everything's under control, Mr. Tinney."

The god was looking like a sleek, well-fed cat tonight, slim and handsome in a dinner jacket, the tail-end of an amused smile lingering on his lips. He dismissed the manager with a nod.

"Almost curtain time," he said. "How do you feel? Nervous?"

"Not a bit," Tinney lied. He was struck with a sudden qualm of fear. Silver's smile was definitely nasty. But then it always was, more or less. Still, if anything went amiss—

Tinney remembered his inexhaustible wallet and steeled himself. Two years of trouping . . . no! He wanted to enjoy life now. And he was going to!

"Two minutes to curtain," said a page-boy, popping into the room.

"Okay. . . . Let's go, Tinney."

They went out and stood in the wings. Mr. Silver applied his eye to a peep-hole.

"Good audience. The orchestra's playing Grieg. That's the cue."

Obediently Tinney walked to front center. With a resounding crash the excerpt from Peer Gynt ended. The curtain rose, revealing a rather ill-at-ease Joseph Tinney standing gaping at the audience.

Remembering his action, he raised his arms high and permitted a diabolic grin to grow on his countenance. It was not an unqualified success. Tinney was not by nature intended to be an actor. He seemed on the verge of going mad, in a pretty unpleasant fashion. In a moment, perhaps, he would drop on all fours and hurl himself across the footlights, teeth bared.

"Oh, well," said Mr. Silver, and made a quick, unobtrusive gesture with one hand. The stage was instantly filled with a dense fog that blotted out Tinney's figure. Tinney found himself standing beside Silver, gasping a little.

As the smoke cleared, a group of green girls was revealed. Their hair was emerald, and behind each one stood a tree.

"Dryads," Mr. Silver remarked.

The dryads broke into a dance. The

fog cleared still farther, permitting the audience a glimpse of an odd figure who sat on a stump, blowing vigorously into a set of pipes. The person's lower extremities were unusual.

"Pan?" Tinney whispered.

"Just a satyr pinch-hitting for him. All the stayrs are musicians. . . ."

A group of centaurs burst onto the stage, and the dryads leaped astride them. The centaurs formed echelons and trotted obediently about the stage. They were apparently well trained.

The manager of the theatre was watching Tinney out of thoughtful, rather wondering eyes.

THERE was a deafening roar. Something lumbered on to the stage. It was a dragon—indubitably a dragon. The immense jaws gaped, fire shot from them, and the centaurs and dryads disappeared. The satyr blew a despairing toot and fell off the stump, to vanish from the audience's ken.

"Now," said Mr. Silver, giving Tinney a little push.

Tinney unwillingly advanced on stage. The dragon stared at him broodingly.

Tinney raised his arms. The dragon began to shrink.

The audience yelled. This was good. A swell illusion. The only dissenter was a youth from Brooklyn, seated in the balcony, who remarked scornfully to his companion, "It's all a fake. I don't take it serious."

"Gee," said his companion, and giggled.

Meanwhile the dragon had been reduced to the size of a Gila monster. Tinney picked it up by the tail and flung it into the air. It turned into a hovering horror with wings, a vulture's body, and the face of an ill-tempered woman. Squalling, the harpy swept out over the audience.

"Wires," said the Brooklynite, nodding wisely. "It's on wires." He ducked as the monster swooped toward his head.

Mr. Silver yawned in a bored fashion and twitched his fingers. The harpy returned to the stage, perched on Tinney's shoulder, and began to sing a popular ballad of the day.

Things went on. . . .

There was an interruption. A tall, saturnine man strode up the aisle, followed by six porters carrying a huge metal cabinet. It was Luciferno.

Tinney's heart flipped over.

By this time the show was well under way. Silver's magic had created illusion after illusion. The manager had retired to his office for an ice-bag and a pint of gin. The stage-hands were talking among themselves. The audience, however, was applauding fiercely.

Luciferno stopped by the runway and yelled something. Tinney hesitated. On stage at the moment were sixteen mermaids, lying on their backs and flipping their tails in unison, with an accuracy that rivaled the Rockettes.

With a questioning glance at Silver, Tinney stepped out on the stage. As he did so, the mermaids vanished.

There was silence.

Luciferno said, "Are you Tinney the Great?"

"That's right."

"I am Luciferno!" the rival magician cried, and vanished in a cloud of crimson smoke. When it cleared, he was standing on the stage beside Silver. The audience applauded.

Luciferno held up his hand for silence. "Wait! I'm here to challenge Tinney the Great. I claim that I'm a greater magician than he. To prove it—"

He raised his arms. Doves began to pour from his coat-sleeves. Dozens of them. Hundreds, apparently. Presently the stage was filled with the birds. . . .

Tinney squinted into the wings at Mr. Silver, who nodded reassuringly and

snapped his fingers. Instantly a head thrust itself out from Tinney's bosom. It wasn't a reassuring sort of head. It was flat, reptilian, and quite horrid. The scales were of a virulent shade of green, and the head, after peering dreamily into Tinney's eyes for one ghastly moment, swung around and darted its tongue at Luciferno, who could not help quailing.

The snake commenced to come out of Tinney's shirt. Inch after inch, foot after foot, yard after yard, poured out. The serpent was endless. It was longer than the longest boa. It lapped itself around the horrified Tinney till the man had completely vanished, concealed under a palpitating mound of shining green coils.

The serpent vanished. There was no trace of Tinney.

He came scrambling up the runway, however, breathing hard, and faced Luciferno once more. "Now what?" he inquired.

Luciferno gestured. The porters lugged the metal box to the stage.

"This!" he cried. "I challenge you to escape from the Enchanted Cabinet. Houdini himself was baffled by it."

Tinney gulped. "Me?"

"Ha!" Luciferno roared. "You dare not try! Then watch!" He swung open the doors of the cabinet, entered, and stood looking out at the audience. "I call for volunteers to examine this prison. Will someone in the audience please—"

THERE was no lack of response. Four men and a woman hurried up the runway, scrutinized the box, tapped it, and seemed satisfied.

"Now lock it," Luciferno demanded.

Good Lord! Did the man intend to incinerate himself, Tinney wondered? He caught the tail end of a significant glance from Luciferno and felt relief. This was the build-up. . . .

The cabinet was closed and locked, and, after a few moments, opened again. Luciferno wasn't in it. He came down an aisle, grinning, and leaped lightly onto the stage.

The audience applauded like mad.

Luciferno bowed. "Wait," he said at last. "Let Tinney the Great try and duplicate my feat. Or better yet!" He seemed to expand. "Let him choose some subject to be locked in the Enchanted Cabinet—and magic him out of it!"

Tinney hesitated, but Luciferno went on swiftly.

"First let me prove that it can be done—by a great magician. Will someone in the audience volunteer—"

There were several responses, and Luciferno selected one. Tinney recognized the man. A stooge. At Luciferno's command, he scrambled into the cabinet.

The routine was gone through again. And, as before, the subject appeared in the aisle.

"Do you dare to attempt that?" Luciferno demanded of Tinney.

"Why—yes. O course. I—"

"Then I shall select the subject, so there will be no chance of trickery. I select that man!" Luciferno pointed into the wings, directly at Mr. Silver, who had been lounging against a prop, obviously enjoying himself.

The god smiled and sauntered out on the stage. He didn't seem troubled. At Luciferno's request he entered the cabinet. Only Tinney saw the other magician make a slight adjustment inside the metal box.

Luciferno slammed the door on the subject. There was silence. The audience waited. . . .

"That did it," Luciferno whispered softly to Tinney. "I released the mechanism. When I shut the door, Silver went up like a puff of smoke."

The audience began to applaud. The two magicians looked over the footlights, and nearly fainted. Sauntering casually up the aisle, beaming happily, was Mr. Silver.

Luciferno hastily swung open the doors of the cabinet. A slight odor of scorching drifted out. The inner walls were burned, Tinney saw. Then he had no time to make further investigations. Mr. Silver was on the stage.

"They did it with trapdoors," said the Brooklynite.

Silver's smile was more than a little nasty. He bowed to the audience, turned to the white-faced Luciferno, and said:

"Tinney the Great's magic is stronger than locks or bars. Tinney the Great has such tremendous powers that even his assistants are greater sorcerers than all other magicians. With your permission—" He bowed to Tinney, who forced a smile.

SILVER faced the audience, snapped his fingers, and turned into a marble statue. Then he turned into Gypsy Rose Lee. Then he turned into an eagle. Then—

It kept on like that.

Finally Silver, in his own shape, proposed an experiment. "Let's have a final contest. Let my master and Luciferno each try to make the other disappear. The one who succeeds is the undoubted master of his art."

The audience liked the idea. So Tinney and his opponent faced each other, while Mr. Silver leaned negligently against the back-drop.

Luciferno began. From somewhere he whipped a sheet and tossed it over Tinney's head. He chanted a sonorous phrase or two. And removed the sheet.

Tinney hadn't vanished.

"Your turn," said Luciferno, not very happily.

Tinney's hand rose without volition. He felt Silver's insistent gaze upon him. Without will of his own, Tinney spoke a word in no known tongue. His fingers twitched.

Luciferno vanished.

"Ulp!" Tinney said, and staggered. Silver covered swiftly.

"This magic is extremely difficult," he explained to the audience, after the applause had died. "My master is exhausted. And it's time for the intermission."

With a crash of music from the pit the curtain dropped. Silver and Tinney were isolated on the stage.

"I wish you wouldn't try tricks like that," the god remarked. "It doesn't do any good, you know. Well, I'll give you another chance. One can't expect too much of mortals."

"I don't know what you mean," Tinney gulped.

"Perhaps you don't," Silver said thoughtfully. "Still . . . it isn't wise. I'm above personal vengeance, myself. I wouldn't harm you—it'd be like kicking a kitten for clawing you. But the Fates are tricky old girls, remember. There's an automatic sort of justice that—well, just keep it in mind."

"I—"

"Forget it. I've got to call up some naiads for the next act. See you later."

"Wait! Where's Luciferno?"

Mr. Silver smiled nastily. "On an island, with an old friend of mine. Ha!" He vanished.

Tinney pushed past the stage-hands and hurried to his dressing-room, where he drank long and deeply from his bottle. Things were looking bad. Still and all, they might be worse. Silver might have been—unpleasant.

Above personal vengeance, was he? Well . . . that was a relief, anyhow.

The thin air swirled before Tinney like a furling curtain and a woman's angry and melodious voice began, "Listen!" before she had completely materialized out of emptiness. "I don't like trespassers, do you hear?"

THE astounded Tinney looked up. She was a particularly luscious creature in a form-fitting garment of thin white linen,

and her black eyes, lambent with fury, reminded Tinney vaguely of Theda Bara's heyday. He blinked at her and took another drink, being by now far beyond astonishment.

Yet he couldn't help realizing that this was not merely another of the pretty dryad chorines whom Mr. Silver apparently ordered up by the dozen. She was a definite personality, and a very angry one. Black brows meeting above magnificent black eyes, she went on in a rich voice:

"I hate trespassers! Somebody's going to pay for this, and it looks as if you—"

"I haven't done anything!" Tinney said hastily. "This is Silver's show."

"Who? Silver? I don't know what you're talking about. I'm talking about that tall, stupid-looking man you teleported to my home. He's the third this week, and I tell you it's got to stop. Somebody's playing jokes, and I won't stand for it. I like isolation. Peace and quiet. And you have the nerve to magic riff-raff all over my island. I warn you, I won't have it."

Tinney stared at her. Magnificent was the word for her, he thought. Lush magnificence in the rather overpowering fashion of a generation ago, when an angry lady was something to quail before. Dangerous and lovely. . . .

He said, "I didn't do a thing. It was Silver. He—"

"Silver? Not Q. Silver?"

"Uh-huh. Quentin."

"Quentin indeed," said the woman, and hurled the rich black ringlets off her white shoulders in a furious gesture. "Quentin! So he's back on earth again, is he? I might have known it. This is his idea of a joke. Well, I never liked him and I don't think it's funny. He did me a dirty trick once before."

The black brows met again and she tapped a sandaled foot.

"Oh?" A thought began to take form in Tinney's mind. Perhaps. . . .

"Listen," he said, "maybe you can help me. I don't like Silver either. Uh—have a drink."

The lady shot him a piercingly suspicious glance. Then the suspicion faded and she permitted herself a slightly mollified smile. "Thanks. Why should I help you?"

"You said you didn't like Silver."

"I don't." She rolled the whiskey around her tongue thoughtfully. "Nice stuff, this. Well, what's the angle?"

Tinney quickly recapitulated. The lady, watching him with a burning black gaze, smiled like a tiger when he had finished. He thought again how extremely beautiful she was, and how far he wished he were from her.

"Why, that's easy," she said, holding out her glass. "Give me a little more—thanks. Haven't you noticed how Silver behaves when it thunders? Frightens him, doesn't it? He's probably A. W. O. L.—absent from Olympus without leave. So he hides during storms when Zeus is abroad."

"I'm afraid—"

"Merc—Silver does it every once in a while," she explained, sipping her drink. "Zeus gets mad as hell till he finds him again. If Zeus knew where your little pal was, he'd snatch him back to Olympus before you could take a deep breath."

"Oh?"

"It's a cinch. Do you remember the spell you used to teleport that man—who? —Luciferno?"

Tinney shuddered. "I wish I could forget it."

"Use it on Silver, fat-head. Just change the first syllable. Make it *Olympus-zak'thing* instead of *Aea-zak'thing*. He'd be teleported to Olympus instantly. And once Zeus sees him, Mr. Silver won't be back to earth in a hurry." She drained her glass and scowled above it, while her richly red lips curved in no pleasant smile.

"Interfere with my island, will he?" she muttered, and added cryptically, "Moly, indeed."

"Moly?"

"Oh—nothing. It's a plant—an herb. Quentin!" She fell silent, brooding..

TINNEY poured her another drink and replenished his own glass. She looked menacing as she stood above him, frowning, and yet singularly exciting too—rather like a typhoon about to strike.

"Won't it be dangerous?" he inquired.

"Oh, no. Silver doesn't take vengeance on earthlings nowadays. He's an easy-going god. Anyhow, he has it coming to him. He shouldn't have meddled with my island, either now or that other time. He deserves punishment and he's overdue for it. There's a sort of justice, you know—the Fates see to that."

She bent a speculative gaze upon Tinney, who quailed without knowing just why.

"Justice," she said again. "They've got it working perfectly now, though goodness knows they should, after all this time. But who'd ever have thought that *you'd* be the means of avenging me on Mer—Silver after all these years! Of course, judging by the story you've told me, there's a little matter of debit against you, too. I wonder—"

With a swish of suddenly displaced air, Mr. Silver made a neat magical landing between them.

The woman dashed her emptied glass to fragments on the floor and shot splendid black lightnings at the newcomer under thunderous black brows.

"Now!" she rolled out the word. "Quick, earthling—the spell!"

Mr. Silver was momentarily taken by surprise. So was Tinney, but desperation sharpened his mind and quickened his reactions. Almost by instinct his hand was moving in a series of gestures. And he was chanting a polysyllabic word he remembered quite well. . . .

"Olympus-zak'thing—"

"Wait!" Silver said urgently, beginning to fade. "Tinney! I warn you—"

Tinney mouthed the last phrase. Mr. Silver vanished.

There was a clap of thunder from far away. The woman patted her snake-like curls.

"That was Zeus. Well, you won't see Silver any more. It'll be centuries before Zeus lets him out of sight again. And now—"

Tinney drained the bottle. His eyes were glistening with triumph. "Here's to crime!" he proposed.

"Ah," said the woman, smiling an alarming smile.

Tinney was too drunk with exultation and Scotch to see it at the moment. "Here's to the Fates, too," he added. "Good old girls—"

"Shut up," said the woman ominously. "The Fates just did me a good turn, and I feel I owe them something. A little matter of balancing their books for them, eh, Tinney?"

He stared at her, a cool premonition stealing over him. "What do you mean?"

"It couldn't have been merely accident that I, of all people, got involved in your nasty little schemes. . . . I wonder if I've lost my old knack," she mused, paying no attention to Tinney's questioning face.

"Eh?"

"Thus," she said. "And thus . . ."

THE manager, tugging worriedly at his hair, headed for Tinney's dressing-room. "Good heavens," he muttered. "Less than a minute to curtain time. Doesn't the man know enough to answer the call-bell? I wish—"

His wish died on his lips as he pushed the dressing-room door open a crack. He retreated as it swung wider and a woman

emerged—a woman who stood facing him with a smile of extreme satisfaction on her lips. She was exceptionally handsome. But the manager didn't know her. He blinked.

"What are you doing here?"

"Meting out justice," she purred. "And a more appropriate justice I never heard of."

"Huh? Who the—who are you?"

"The name," she said, "is Circe."

The manager stared at her blankly. "Oh. Well." He raised his voice. "Tinney! Mr. Tinney! It's curtain time." No response from beyond the door, which was once more closed. Only a curious hasty clicking. . . .

He's inside," said the woman. The manager glanced around, just in time to see the circumambient air engulf her statuesque charms. He scarcely blinked. After what had been going on under this roof tonight, nothing would ever surprise him again.

"Tinney!" he bawled, thrusting his shoulder against the door, which had apparently stuck. "Curtain time! The orchestra's vamping! Come out!"

THE door yielded suddenly, and the manager staggered into the dressing-room, almost losing his balance. For a moment he did not realize that the cubicle's occupant was obviously not the magician. Automatically he snapped:

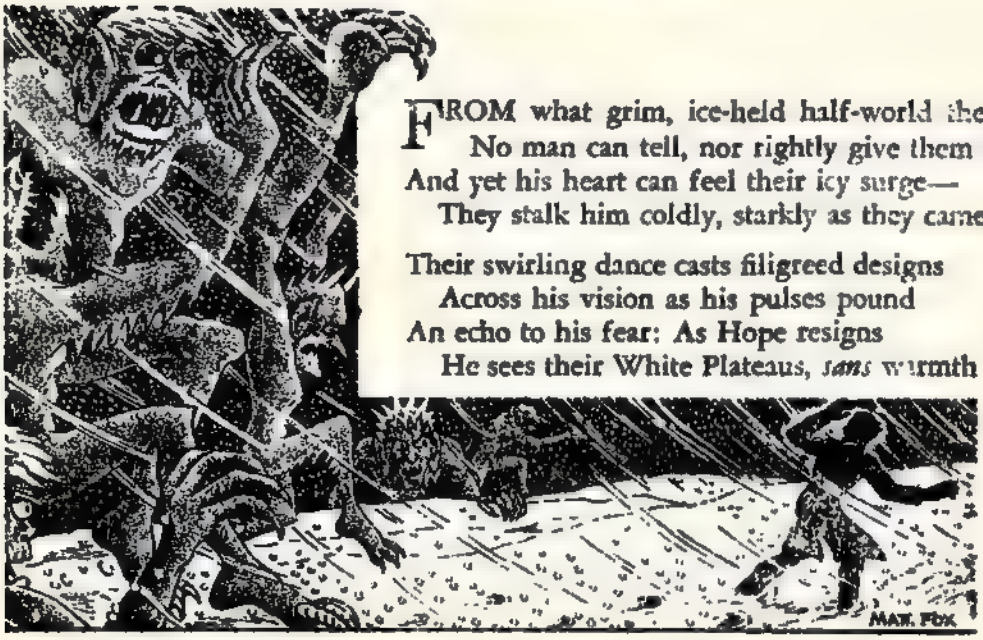
"Curtain going up, Tinney! Didn't you hear me?"

This time there was an answer—of sorts.

"Oink!"

Frost Demons

By JOSEPH C. KEMPE



FROM what grim, ice-held half-world they emerge
No man can tell, nor rightly give them name;
And yet his heart can feel their icy surge—
They stalk him coldly, starkly as they came.

Their swirling dance casts filigreed designs
Across his vision as his pulses pound
An echo to his fear: As Hope resigns
He sees their White Plateaus, *sans* warmth or sound.

A Bottle of Gin

What would you do if you were suddenly faced by a fifty-foot pillar in human shape—black-limbed, writhing like a snake, and with an insane desire to destroy?

By ROBERT BLOCH

MR. COLLINS scampered up the steps. His twitching chin, long, wobbly ears, and pinkly bloodshot eyes gave him the appearance of a frightened rabbit. Rabbit-fashion, he glanced fearfully over his shoulder, then scurried into the burrow of the building.

Little Mr. Collins bounded down a long hall on short legs. The museum corridor was deserted, but his pink eyes revolved fearfully. With a sigh of relief, he made for a door marked *Curator's Office* and hurried inside.

The young lady in the outer waiting room rose from her desk with a look of vague solicitude.

"Tom," she exclaimed. "Tom—where have you been? You worried me sick

these past three days. Why didn't you call me?"

Mr. Collins gave her a fleeting glance.

"Sorry, Edith. I can't explain now. Is the Doctor in?"

The young lady marched around the desk. Her lips curled, not in solicitude, but in sudden scorn.

"Tom—you've been drinking again! Out on another bender, I suppose. Just look at you! A fine wreck you are. Haven't been to bed for three days, I suppose."

Little Mr. Collins groaned. "That's right. I haven't. But it's not what you think, Edith, honest it's not. I haven't touched a drop—"

"Huh!" Edith snorted scornfully. It was a most unpleasant sound, and Mr. Collins winced. Then he straightened.

"I've got to see Doctor Sweet at once," he insisted.

"He's busy. Can't be disturbed. Now, Tom, look at me! I want you to explain right this instant just what you've been up to and—"

Mr. Collins suddenly darted past her and whirled through an inner door. His sweaty palm locked it behind him.

He stood, gasping for breath, in Doctor Sweet's private office. The Curator's sanctum was large, and necessarily so. For the room was literally and incredibly stuffed with objects. Rows of books. Shelves of books. Piles of books. Statuary. Idols. Figurines. Tables filled with jars. Tables filled with vases. Tables filled with bottles. The floor was carpeted with papers and manuscripts. The desk in the center of the room was completely submerged beneath a miscellany of paraphernalia.

It took a full minute before Mr. Collins was able to detect the figure of Doctor Sweet, buried behind the debris on his desk. Then the Doctor rose, as if to fully establish his presence.

"Well?" said the old man. His hands raked upward over a dome-like forehead and into a tangle of bushy white hair. They finally encountered a pair of spectacles, which Doctor Sweet now drew down to eye level.

"By Bel and Astarte!" he exclaimed. "Collins!"

Little Mr. Collins took a step forward and gulped. "I'm back," he announced. "So I see. Burn me in Moloch's mouth if you aren't! Have you got it, man? Have you got it?"

"Here."

MR. COLLINS fumbled inside his coat, drew out an object wrapped in tissue-paper.

Doctor Sweet grabbed for it with careful haste. We undid the wrappings, then cupped the object in his hands.

"Perfect!" he muttered. "Early Korean. This vase completes the collection. By the Cabala, it's a gem. I congratulate you."

Mr. Collins turned pale. "You'd better offer me condolences," he whispered.

"What's the matter?"

"What's the matter? Don't you *know?*"

"I've been very busy, son. Very busy. Going through my collection. Three days now."

"Well, while you've been going through your collection, I've been going through hell."

"Very interesting." Doctor Sweet turned, his hands caressing the tear-vase. "You must tell me about it some time. Right now I'm very busy. Excuse me."

"Listen, Doctor." Collins was tense. "If you don't hear me now, there may not be another time."

"Quit talking nonsense, son. I asked you to go up to Mr. Sung's house to buy this vase. You've done so. What you've been doing in the past three days does not concern me. Out on a rip-snorter, I'll bet." The old man cackled suddenly.

Collins lost his temper.

"You make me sick!" he shouted. "You and your secretary both! Out on a tear, was I? I'll have you know that for the past three days I've been riding the subway in fear of my life."

"Very dangerous things, subways," Doctor Sweet observed. "Never ride them myself."

Mr. Collins uttered a low moan.

"Get this through your head," he screeched. "When I went up to Sung's place to buy the vase, his downstairs shop was robbed. Some thugs held up the antique place and we heard them. Sung went down the stairs after them and they shot him. They saw me with the vase in my hand and started after me—three of them. Gorillas."

"My goodness!" clucked the Doctor, as though humoring a child. "Must have been after that fine antique collection of his."

"Of course they were," Collins wailed. "But that's not important. They were after me, too."

"This vase is worth twenty thousand," the Doctor gloated. "I don't blame them. By Eblis, I don't at that."

Collins muttered something under his breath, then recovered. "So I ran out the back entrance and made for the subway. They followed me. And for the last three days I've been dodging them from train to train. They're after me in shifts. I recognize all three of them now. Naturally I couldn't go to the police because there's no record that Sung sold the vase to me before he was murdered. So I've had to ride the damned trains until I could get away, without sleep or rest or food or—"

"How distressing." Doctor Sweet placed the vase carefully on a shelf. "Well, the vase is safe now. Why don't you go home and shave? You look awful."

Mr. Collins danced a cadenza of fright about the room.

"I'll look quite awful if they catch up with me," he answered. "I'm afraid to leave for fear they're waiting outside."

"By the Four Books!" exclaimed the Doctor. "That's very exciting, isn't it? If I were in your place then, I wouldn't go outside."

Mr. Collins suddenly slumped into a chair.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm dying," he groaned. "Dying from hunger. For mercy's sake, get me something to eat."

"I have a sandwich left from lunch in the other office," said Doctor Sweet, dubiously. "Do you care for minced ham?"

"I'll swallow anything," Collins gasped.

Abruptly, the little man's eyes swivelled to the row of bottles and beakers on the desk. There were tall bottles and small bottles, some stoppered and some open Green ones and brown ones.

"That's what I need," he mumbled to himself. "A drink."

"What's that?" Doctor Sweet paused at the door.

"I merely asked you what was in that bottle."

Collins levelled a finger at random, selecting a tall brown bottle which stood apart from the rest at the back of the table.

"That bottle?" Doctor Sweet eyed him curiously.

"Yes."

The Doctor told Collins in a single word. He left the room.

TWO SECONDS later Collins was at the table. His frantic fingers scrabbled at the bottle, tore at the tight cork. He wrenched it free, held the brown bottle, to his lips, and gulped. Then he sank back and tottered over to his chair.

When Doctor Sweet re-entered the room he found Mr. Collins sitting slumped in his seat with a most peculiar expression on his face.

Suddenly he gave a little hiccup.

The Doctor ignored it and extended a sandwich.

"Here's the minced ham," he said.

Collins peered at the offering with pale distaste.

"I don't want it," he said.

"What's that?"

Collins hiccuped again.

"Something wrong?"

"Hic."

"Collins—what's the matter?"

"Hic."

Doctor Sweet shook the little man's shoulders.

"What did you do?" he demanded.

"I—hic—took a swig out of that bottle of—hic—gin you have."

"Gin?" said Doctor Sweet. "By Allah's beard, I haven't any gin here."

"You said so before you left," Collins accused. "You told—hic—me that there was gin in that brown bottle."

"Great jumping dervishes!"

"What's—hic—wrong?"

"I didn't say there was gin in that bottle."

"No?"

"I said there was a *djinn* in there."

Doctor Sweet goggled. "A *djinn,*" he repeated. "A genie. An elemental spirit imprisoned in a bottle. And you've *swallowed* him!"

Collins nodded weakly.

"I just took a gulp," he whispered. "Something went down into my stomach, hard. Hic."

"Dear me," the Doctor wailed. "One of my most priceless treasures, too. That bottle was hundreds of years old. Found off the Persian Gulf. I've always been careful to keep it sealed, too. These *djinn* are terribly dangerous if let free. That's why Solomon imprisoned them. And now you've got to go and swallow one."

Collins tottered to his feet.

"You mean I have a guy in my stomach?" he croaked. "Well, get him out of there." Excitement stifled his hiccups.

Doctor Sweet ran his hand into cottony hair. "I'm afraid I can't," he whispered. "You don't understand. If the *djinn* is released, he'll run wild. You'll just have to keep him there."

"Not on your life," Collins announced. "I want a meal on my stomach, not a midget."

"That's just it," the Doctor answered. "The *djinn* is a small creature when he is imprisoned. But once released, his substance grows like a cloud of smoke. He becomes a huge pillar in human shape. Perhaps fifty feet tall. He wants to destroy, wreak havoc."

COLLINS wasn't listening. He was busily engaged in thrusting a finger down his throat.

Doctor Sweet jumped for his hand.

"No, don't!" he gasped. "He'll escape."

"I want him to. You think I'm going to walk around with this—monster—inside of me? Get him back in his bottle."

"I wish I could," sighed the Doctor. "But he wouldn't go back. From now on, *you're* his bottle."

"Me?" Collins stared at his paunch. "I'm a human bottle for some oriental demon?"

"I'm afraid so. We'll just have to find a way out, somehow."

Collins glanced despairingly at the ham sandwich.

"I'm so hungry," he wailed. He reached for the bread.

"You can't eat." Doctor Sweet snatched his hand back. "Don't you understand? Food will *displace* the *djinn.*"

"What'll we do, then? Stomach pump?"

"And let him out? Certainly not!"

"You've got to think of something, quick!"

"I know, I know." The Doctor moved towards the window, head bowed. He wheeled, suddenly. "Do you snore?"

"Snore? What's that matter?"

"Do you snore?" the Doctor demanded.

"Suppose so."

"Then," decided the old man, "I must forbid you to sleep. Once you fall asleep and let your mouth hang open, the *djinn* comes out."

"Oh!" groaned Collins. "Fine help you are!"

"Of course," the Doctor mused, "you can have three wishes."

"Wishes?"

"Yes. It is a custom of *djinns* to offer their captors three wishes before being released. You might make a deal with the *djinn*."

"How?"

"Maybe you can talk to him," suggested Doctor Sweet.

"Talk to my own stomach?"

"Ventriloquists do."

Mr. Collins drew a long breath. "All right," he muttered. "All right, then." He paused. His voice receded peculiarly in his throat.

"Hey! Hey you down there."

A sound came from Collins' mouth. It wasn't his voice, but a voice spoke. A hollow voice. An entombed voice.

"Yes, Master."

THE actual sound of the reply disconcerted both men. Collins shuddered. When he attempted to go on, he discovered that there was really nothing his trembling voice could say. What would one say to a *djinn* under such circumstances?

"How's—how's things down there?" was the only inanity he could bring forth.

"Very distressing, Master. Please permit me to leave."

"He wants out," Collins whispered.

The Doctor nodded. "Naturally."

"What about my three wishes?" Collins asked.

The voice from his stomach grew soft. "But certainly, Master! Three wishes—whatever your esteemed presence desires." Collins turned to Doctor Sweet. "You heard him? Suppose I wish he was back in his bottle?"

SWEET shook his head. "Wouldn't work, I'm afraid. That's destroying part of the agreement, you see."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The Doctor took Collins by the shoulder. "On second thought, I don't believe it's safe for you to wish at all. Because on the third wish he comes out."

"But I could make two—"

A voice interrupted them. It was the *djinn*.

"Will you release me then, oh Master?"

"I've got to think about it for a while," Collins temporized. He turned to the window with a sigh of despair. His eyes suddenly revolved in their sockets.

"There!" he breathed. "Look down there!"

"What's the matter?"

"You see those three men?"

"Yes?"

"They're the gorillas who've been following me. They're coming in—I've got to get out of here."

"But the *djinn*—"

"Never mind him." Collins bolted for the door.

The Doctor wheezed after him.

"Here," he urged. "Take this with you. And good luck." He held out the brown bottle and its cork. Collins grabbed for them hastily.

"Remember," warned Doctor Sweet. "Don't let them shoot you, or anything. The *djinn* would escape through the holes."

With a sob, Collins rushed through the door.

THE girl in the outer office confronted him with an icy stare. Her eyes wandered to the bottle he was clutching in his hand.

"So!" she accused.

"But Edith—it's empty. Look?" Collins held it upside down.

"I know it is. Drank it all, did you?"

"I haven't touched a drop," Collins began.

But another voice broke in.

"Who is this houri, Master?"

Edith whirled.

"What did you say, Tom?"

"Is it your wish that I destroy her?" the *djinn* continued, blandly.

"No, no—nothing." Collins answered both voices at once. The effort was too much. He hiccuped softly.

"Tom, you're sick."

Collins nodded. "Stomach trouble," he said.

"Let me get you some bicarbonate," Edith suggested, softening.

"No, don't. He wouldn't like it."

"Who wouldn't like it?"

"Why the thing down there—inside me," Collins began, then checked himself.

"Are you raving, Tom?"

"I don't know!" The little man's eyes blinked rapidly. "Let me out of here," he commanded. "Quick! They'll be after me in a minute."

"What's after you? Tom Collins—you have d.t.s., that what's the matter."

"Hold your lying tongue, wench." The voice came from the stomach.

Edith gasped. As her mouth opened, Collins made a break for the door.

Dodging along the hall, he neared the entrance. Then he halted, sick with sudden dread.

Standing squarely on the steps below were the figures of three men—the stocky little fellow in the blue overcoat, the tall, thin man wearing a derby, and the ugly fat gentleman with his hand significantly inside his coat pocket.

Collins stared into the three blue-jowled faces. He saw tight lips and little eyes; a kaleidoscope of hairy knuckles, protruding jaws, and jutting brows.

They are waiting for him to come out.

Collins slipped the glass bottle into his coat. He crouched back in the doorway and mopped his forehead.

Let them wait, he decided. He was willing. Just as long as he was inside and they were outside—

But they weren't going to stay outside.

Collins saw the three huddle together. The man with the derby whispered, gesturing significantly towards the building. Then the three wheeled. They began to march slowly up the steps.

"Oh, oh!" breathed Collins.

"Master?" inquired the voice from within his stomach.

But "Master" didn't have the time to reply. With a courage born of desperation alone, Collins decided to dash for it. If he could run through them as they were caught coming up the steps now—

He burst from the building and clattered down the stairs. They saw him coming, attempted to dodge. He caromed into the trio, hurling his body forward at the fat man in the center.

WITH a grunt of surprise, the fat man staggered back. His two companions tripped over his legs, sprawled down the steps.

Mr. Collins hurdled their tangled bodies and continued down. Then he turned. They were on their feet again, and this time the fat man waved a gun. He didn't wave it long. He began to point it. He pointed it directly where it would do Mr. Collins the least possible good.

Collins looked around wildly for a hole in the pavement. There was none. No

place to hide, no place to run to for shelter. He was in the open; a visible target.

"This is it!" he groaned.

"What, Master?"

The voice came through a fog. Then Collins remembered.

"Djinn," he croaked. "Now's the chance to show your stuff. I wish you'd take care of these babies, quick."

"Your wish," echoed the *djinn,* "is my command."

Almost without volition, Collins felt himself running towards the man with the gun.

The three hoodlums faced him in astonishment. The fat man steadied his aim, ready to fire. And then—

Collins *felt* it happen. The feeling of growth, stealing along his throat. The trio before him *saw* it happen.

They were gaping at his mouth. It was a small mouth, but from it protruded the largest tongue in the world. Or something.

Something—something long and black. Something muscled and menacing. Something that writhed forth like a snake of smoke, swelling to unbelievable proportions from Collins' opened mouth. Something that waved in the air, extending claws and a fist.

"Look out!" shrilled the thin man, suddenly. "He's on fire—smoke's coming out of his mouth!"

But it was not smoke that darted forward a dozen feet in advance of the charging Mr. Collins.

The fat man realized this when he felt the black column against his chin. He didn't have a chance to realize anything else before he sagged to the pavement.

The gun fell from his hand. His stocky little companion snatched it up and cursed.

"You will, will ya?" he snarled. A shot pumped into the black pillar rising from Collins' throat. It thudded home, but the huge inky paw of smoke merely swirled about his head and descended.

There was the sound of a walnut cracking, magnified ten times.

"Hey!" yelled the third party, as Collins turned, and the horrid limb reared once more. "Holy Moses!"

But Moses, sanctified or not, did nothing to help him. The black triphammer descended and sent the last man to join his fellows on the ground in a soggy heap.

Slowly, the emanation disappeared from before Mr. Collins' face.

He stood there for a moment and rubbed his aching jaws.

"Whew! he panted. "How did you do that?"

"It is simple, Master. "Any wish of yours—to hear is to obey."

"Was that really your arm?" Collins asked, weakly.

"Indeed. Am I not many cubits tall?"

"Don't talk about it," begged the rescued man. "It upsets my stomach just to think about it."

"Your other two wishes?" pursued the voice of the *djinn.* "Perhaps you would like some stomach tablets?" it went on, craftily.

"No, not that," said Collins. "Give me a little more time to think."

"But I desire my freedom from this prison," the *djinn* complained. "I am no Jonah."

"I'm no whale, either," Collins snapped. "Believe me, this hurts me more than it does you."

It was true. Collins had a terrific stomach ache. The *djinn* was moving around down there. Let's see—if it fitted into the brown bottle, it could reduce its size to about four inches. Still, that was quite a bellyful at that.

Too much for Collins. But at the moment, he had other matters to consider.

HE TOOK one more glance at the three forms on the pavement. He trem-

bled, thinking of what might have happened if any passersby had chanced to wander down the street while the battle was in progress.

"Must get away before somebody comes along," he muttered. He started up the block and rounded a corner rapidly. He moved briskly along for ten minutes before slackening his panic-driven pace.

During this time he was becoming more and more aware of the load he carried under his belt. The *djinn,* unused to his queer surroundings, was evidently pacing back and forth.

"Will you kindly cut out walking around inside of me?" Collins begged, hoping no one else was listening.

"Is that a wish?" asked the *djinn.*

"No. Oh, let it go."

Collins shrugged. An old woman walking ahead of him glanced back. Collins closed his lips and tried to look sedate.

But not in time. A hiccup escaped from his mouth.

"Excuse me," mumbled Collins.

"Me also," said the voice from his stomach.

The woman quickly glanced away again.

"Drunken sot," she muttered.

Collins blushed.

"I wish they wouldn't—" he began then stopped.

No. That wouldn't do. He had to be careful about wishes. He mustn't say he wished he could get some sleep, or some food, or a moment's peace. The price to pay was too great.

Yet he must do something. And quickly. Collins realized the impossibility of his situation. The *djinn* must be disposed of.

"Could I wish he wasn't here?" Collins wondered. "Or was Doctor Sweet right when he said I couldn't get rid of him that way?"

He glanced down at the brown bottle he still carried under one arm. The *djinn's* bottle. How to get him back in? That was the problem. That's what he must wish for.

Ouch! The *djinn* was evidently doing a tap dance now. Collins patted his stomach gingerly.

"Who's there?" came the voice.

"Oh, shut up!" Collins barked.

A man beside him suddenly shied away. He cast a leering glance at the bottle under Collins' arm.

Collins ducked into an alley.

"Now see what you're doing," he complained. "Everybody keeps thinking I'm drunk. This simply can't go on"

"Make a wish," the *djinn* coaxed.

Collins brandished his brown bottle in futile rage.

Suddenly he smiled, as inspiration came. He stared at the bottle curiously. Here was his solution, after all!

"All right," he whispered. "I'll make a wish. Get this one, *djinn.* And get it right, because this wish is important."

"To hear is to obey."

Collins took a deep breath in anticipation. He gloated over the words.

"I wish this bottle you came in had never even existed!"

For a moment there was a stunning silence. And then—

Collins felt it in his fingers. A lessening of weight. He glanced down at the bottle he was holding in his hand. But there was no bottle! There was nothing at all between his fingers.

WITH a curious shock, Collins realized that there never *had* been anything there. He had never carried a bottle, never seen one. He couldn't exactly *remember* what it looked like.

The little man sighed deeply. "That's that," he breathed.

"You spoke, Master?"

The incredible voice, again. And still from his stomach.

"What the—thought you were gone!"

"Not *I*," the *djinn* corrected. "Merely the bottle. But I'm not in the bottle, remember. I'm in you."

Collins clasped both hands to his head. "All right," he groaned. "I can't get rid of you. I give up."

"And let me out?" persisted the *djinn* eagerly.

"I don't know."

Collins lurched out of the alley. He walked along in a daze.

"That does it," he told himself. "Now the bottle's gone. I can never get him back into what doesn't exist."

"Master!"

That hateful voice again.

"What is it?"

"Your third wish, Master?"

COLLINS couldn't answer. His third wish? He had so many of them. He wished the damned genie wouldn't keep calling him "Master" for one thing. Because in reality, the *djinn* was *his* master. The *djinn* kept him from eating, from sleeping, from associating with human beings. And how Collins wished he could eat and sleep and meet his fellow men again!

But he dare not wish aloud. He dare not release this creature and he couldn't keep on going this way. He couldn't.

Automatically his feet led him up the stairs to his own apartment. On the way the *djinn* joggled up and down inside him with every step. It complained bitterly about the climb, too. Collins was glad the hall was empty.

Oh well, it wouldn't be for long.

Once inside, Collins went straight to his pantry. There was a fifth of gin there. Gin, by all that was ironic! He opened it and took a swig. A healthy swig. It gave him the courage he needed for what he was about to do.

Collins sat down at the phone and dialed the museum. He had to. He owed it to the girl to tell her. In a moment she answered.

"Edith?"

"Yes—oh, Tom, it's you."

"Edith, I want to say good-bye."

"But Tom, where are you going?"

Collins didn't hesitate before he answered.

"Down to the pier."

"Tom, you're not going to—"

Collins hung up quickly. He'd made a damned fool of himself again. But it was no use. He couldn't tell Edith what he meant to tell her. About the *djinn*. About the way he loved her.

It was loving her that drove him to drink in the first place. That feeling of inferiority. She was always so calm, so cool. So unapproachable. And he was just a little museum clerk.

That's why he had clung to the vase the last three days, even with those men on his trail. Because Doctor Sweet had promised him an assistant curatorship if he managed to get it. Then he and Edith could be married. But now the *djinn* had come and there was no way out.

These were the things he meant to tell her. But he couldn't. And what was the use? He'd go down to the pier now and take the plunge. He and the *djinn* together. It was the only way out.

Collins pocketed his fifth and left. Before going out the hall door, he took another drink. It consoled. And it enabled Collins to walk the five blocks down to the beach.

The *djinn* was mercifully silent. It threshed around from time to time, but Collins didn't care. In a few moments it would all be over.

COLLINS scanned the deserted autumn vista of the beach. With plodding steps he moved out along the short white stretch of the pier. The water churned icily around the stones.

His head was clearing. That would never do.

Collins took out his gin and drank. Deeply. Then he sat down at the end of the pier. He stared at the greenish-black depths of the water. Water—how he hated it! Gin was better.

He took another swig. The fifth was going down. It would go down and then he would. He drank again. It warmed him.

"Master."

The damned voice again! Collins forced himself to reply.

"What is it?"

"Where are we? I'm warm."

"Never mind."

"But I feel very strange, Master."

Good! The gin was displeasing to the demon. Collins took another drink, a long one. With malicious satisfaction, he tilted the fifth back.

"Ooooh, Master—that burns!"

"It feels fine."

And it did feel fine. Collins was aware of tipsiness. A pleasant sensation.

"I'm getting all wet," the *djinn* pleaded.

"You'll be wetter in a minute," Collins chuckled.

He would be, too. Because when Collins jumped off the pier—

But that could wait. Another drink now.

Collins began to feel good. He anticipated the moment of release. The water looked inviting now.

"Master—what is this?"

"A little stomach medicine. Just what you advised me."

"But it smells strange."

"You'll get used to it."

"Strong. It's like fire."

Collins began to laugh. "Best stuff I ever drank," he chortled.

"You drink this?" The *djinn* was incredulous.

"Of course."

"Oh."

Then there was silence. Collins drank recklessly.

"This is good." The *djinn's* voice rose on a note of discovery.

"Glad you like it."

"Let's have some more."

"Why not?" Collins took another sip.

"You are right, Master. It is excellent. Warming."

THIS was the last straw. The *djinn* was actually getting drunk on the gin Collins absorbed!

"Let's have a lot more of it," the voice suggested. It was loud, yet oddly blurred.

Collins obliged with enthusiasm.

"Say, Master."

"Yeah?"

"How 'bout that other wish of yours?"

"Forget it."

"Very kind of you. Very. Have a drink on that."

They drank.

"Hot down here. Makes me thirsty." The *djinn* was slurring his words now. "Can't stand up right."

"Lie down, then."

"Can't lie down. Want another drink."

Again the fifth was lifted. Collins drained the last drop.

"Good. You're th' mos' exalted of all Mas'ters."

Collins could feel the *djinn* swaying around. He stood up. Now the gin was gone, and it was time to act. The party had been swell while it lasted, but it was over. The thought of entertaining two hangovers at once was impossible. Collins looked down at the water again and took a deep breath.

"Mas'ter!"

"What is it?'

"Wanna 'nother drink."

"No," replied Collins brusquely. "No more drinks."

"Please. Got to have one."

Collins exulted. The *djinn* was frankly

begging now. Let him—it served him right for the misery he caused.

"Just one. Please."

"No! Why should I give you a drink? What have you ever done for me? You wreck my life, you plot against me, you take possession of my nice warm stomach and jump around. You think I like to walk around feeling as though I were going to have a baby or something?"

"Jus' one little drink!" the *djinn* begged.

"Absolutely none," Collins retorted.

"But I wanna—enchanting stuff—do anything."

Collins felt the *djinn's* drunken frame quiver with eagerness. He glanced down at the empty fifth beside him, then looked at the water again.

Suddenly Collins sat down.

"Listen," he whispered, softly.

"Lis'ning," the *djinn* mumbled.

"You really want that drink?"

"I swear it, Mas'er."

"Then," said Collins, "you can come and get it."

"Wha'ssat?"

"I said you'll have to come after it—I'm tired of pouring the stuff down to you."

"You'll let me out?"

"Why not? If you want a drink, come and get it."

"To hear," mumbled the *djinn*, "is to 'bey."

Collins opened his mouth to reply.

THE reply never came. His throat was choked—choked with smoke. A cloud welled from his parted lips, an ebon pillar poured forth in the air above him. Not an arm this time, but a gigantic billow that swirled inchoately in midair.

Collins caught a glimpse of a coalescing pattern—an unbelievably huge torso, towering coal-black limbs, and a pair of bloodshot rolling eyes like striated billiard balls.

"Wait!" he whispered. "It's down in there." His trembling finger indicated the fifth of gin.

The inky column wavered drunkenly. Materialization halted.

"You'll never get it that way," Collins repeated. "You're too big."

The smoke spiraled in woozy indecision. Suddenly it began to contract.

Swiftly it was shrinking to human size, then to child's height. A little black smoke doll danced over to the standing fifth.

"Smaller still," Collins whispered.

Obediently, the *djinn* contracted. A tiny ebony wisp hovered about the neck of the fifth.

"In there," Collins directed.

The wisp hesitated. A shrill little piping voice rose.

"But it's inside the bottle," it protested maudlinly.

Collins gasped.

"Yes," he breathed. "And so are you!"

His darting hand pushed the smoky wraith down the neck of the empty fifth bottle. His fingers rammed the cap over the top. He twisted it tightly.

Inside the gin bottle, the *djinn* danced up and down in drunken rage. Its wrinkled little black face was contorted, and Collins saw its mouth shaping curses he could not hear.

Nor did he hear the shrill honking of the horn from the beach behind him.

It was not until Edith had jumped from the car and run clattering out onto the pier to where he stood that Collins turned his head.

Then she was in his arms, sobbing just a little as she poured out her words in a torrent of tenderness.

"Oh, Tom, thank goodness I'm in time . . . poor dear . . . suicide over me . . . Doctor Sweet explained about everything, how you got his vase for him . . . promotion . . . and when I looked out the win-

dow and saw those three awful men lying there . . . what you did to them . . . never knew you were so strong and wonderful . . . get married."

It went something like that, between sobs and hugs and quite undignified kisses.

Collins liked it a lot.

Edith retrieved her dignity just once, and only for a moment. She saw the gin bottle standing there on the pier edge and turned away.

"But Tom . . . you'll have to promise me you'll stop drinking."

"Certainly, dear," whispered the little man. "From now on I'm off the bottled goods forever."

Edith smiled happily. Stooping, she picked up the fifth bottle with an impulsive gesture. She flung it into the water.

Collins watched appreciatively. It was a good throw. The bottle bobbed far out on the waves.

"That's a load off my mind," the girl murmured, happily.

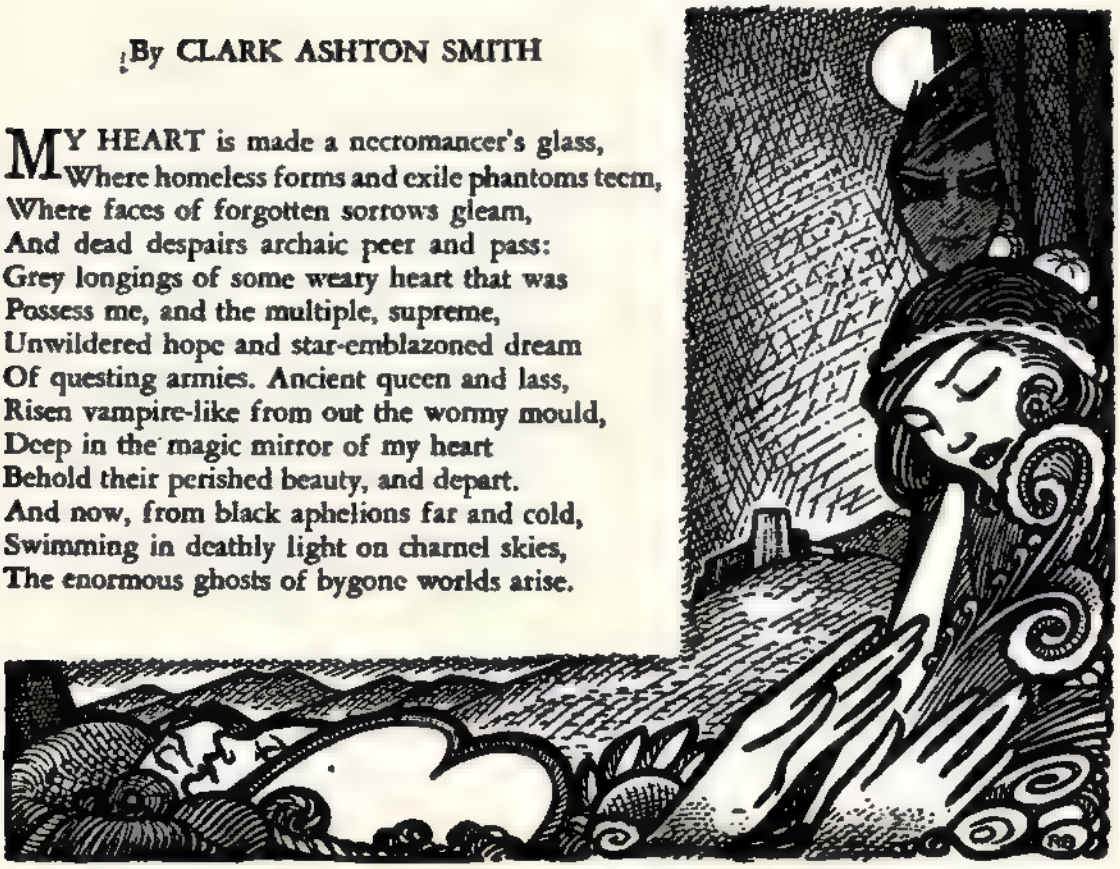
"That's a load off my—"

But Collins didn't say it. He merely held Edith very closely to him, so that he couldn't see the *djinn* bottle as it floated away toward the open sea.

Necromancy

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

MY HEART is made a necromancer's glass,
Where homeless forms and exile phantoms teem,
Where faces of forgotten sorrows gleam,
And dead despairs archaic peer and pass:
Grey longings of some weary heart that was
Possess me, and the multiple, supreme,
Unwildered hope and star-emblazoned dream
Of questing armies. Ancient queen and lass,
Risen vampire-like from out the wormy mould,
Deep in the magic mirror of my heart
Behold their perished beauty, and depart.
And now, from black aphelions far and cold,
Swimming in deathly light on charnel skies,
The enormous ghosts of bygone worlds arise.



The Wind

By RAY BRADBURY

This is dedicated to those who have lost the game of the elements, by one who has always escaped . . . until tonight.

JOHN COLT was awake and listening. . . .

Moonlight sluiced into his room by the huge triple window fronting the upstairs of the house, fell across his sharp, questioning features.

The wind moved far away in the night, and Colt's lips worked as he listened to it; moving stealthily and mournfully from the sea, approaching the house as surely as mighty horses hooves.

Colt's body shivered, hairs stood erect upon his neck, and goose-pimples clustered on his limbs. He knew why he felt this way. After ten years he could believe nothing else.

He knew the wind was coming toward him—and he slipped from bed, thrust himself tremblingly into a robe, found carpet slippers and ventured downstairs to await its arrival.

He went to the phone, thinking, "This

is what I've waited for, calmly at first. Curious. Alert. Sure of most factors. But I don't know how much I can stand. I keep losing my grip, gaining it, and losing it again."

His hand shook as he dialed the call through. "Hello, Herb? This is Colt."

"John—how are you?"

"Not so good. And, like a fool, I dismissed my servants today. I'm alone. . . .

All the while he talked, Colt listened. The weird music of the wind was muted by distance. It waxed louder.

"My writing routine for the last week's been shot to hell, Herb. Been trying to get some rest early tonight, but—"

What was that? Colt winced. A tiny breeze, preamble to the wind now on its way, rattled a shutter. Colt thought, did I lock every door, check everything?

"Sorry to hear that, John—" Herb Thompson was talking. Colt gave ear, then:

"Herb, I'd like to have you come for the night. Can you arrange—"

"I'll have to ask the little woman, John. Hold on."

A pause. Thompson was conferring with his wife. And far off the wind rose steadily, rapidly. "Sorry, Colt, Alice says we've got company coming."

"Oh." Colt swallowed. "Look, Herb, it's important. I've got theories about—well." He stopped, groping for words.

"Sounds like a case of nerves," said Thompson. "Why don't *you* come over here?"

"That wouldn't help." Colt shook his head. "I don't know *what* would. I—well—I'll call back in half an hour."

He hung up. What could Herb do? Nothing. It wouldn't be fair to drag an innocent into this set-up. And, anyway, how explain to Herb about the wind? Police help? They'd send a soft-pad squad.

Colt deliberately opened the front door. A lopsided frame of moonlight stroked across the gleaming floor, picked out his wine-colored robe and slippers. He stood, shivering, waiting.

THE great wind could be only a mile away now, soughing through a long high, dim corridor of swaying elms, plunging down the arboreal path toward Colt's lonely country manor.

Colt lit a cigarette, but his dark eyes fastened on the tree lane; eyes that had seen Rangoon, Stockholm, swept from Nairobi to the Amazon.

It was a dark, meaningful wind. Others might have been amused by Colt's wild thoughts. Thompson, for instance, would laugh uproariously.

But Colt was not amused. Alone out here, the nine o'clock countryside steeped in a vast tide of shadowed, eerie silence, this fortress of a house his final refuge, the last roll of dice forced on him, Colt could only wait.

The last stand. Decks cleared for action. Colt dragged on his cigarette, flicked it away, thinking, if I scream no one will hear me. No one. I'm far from town. Too damned far.

He'd phone Herb in twenty minutes. What to say? Something like this: "Herb, it began ten years ago when I was investigating phenomena. I'd been around, seen hurricanes, typhoons and whirlwinds. I knew what wind could do.

"Well, I was in Tibet. I heard of a mountain called the mountain of Winds; the space where the dark winds from all over the earth congregate at one time or other. It's a vast evil mountain, gray and jutting; hard, bony rock without a hand or foothold. Blasphemy to touch it.

"I touched it, Herb. More, I scaled it. Up thousands of sickening, dizzy feet, climbing where only madmen climb to probe into what's better left undissected. I gained its crest raw and wounded.

Of all the high, wild places I've seen

this was the most terrifying. On its very peak cleft a scar of valley through which a tide of wind rushed shrieking; not one wind but millions, small and large, light and smoke-hued.

Snow, rain, sleet and hail rang all about on the rocks. The blunt flesh of the mount sustained it all, and I perceived this from a niche, protected.

"Oh, how the clouds shot by there, high up, like creamy shreds torn from some huge and belabored wool-skin.

"What a noise. What a view. What force and violence.

"How I snailed up or down, or escaped, I don't know. Call it luck, fate, the will of an intervening God. But I cleaved like a lichen, hung, dropped, picked myself up, dropped again, scrambled and ran, afraid of what I'd seen.

"I got to Bombay. From time to time, after that, there were suggestions of what would follow. Nothing definitely singling me out for action, but general disturbances that occurred with ungodly precision wherever I traveled. Then, they ceased. I thought I had it licked. Until this week, six nights ago.

"I lay sleepless and listening. I heard a wind that night, Herb. Chuckling and laughing about the house, just for an hour or so, not very long and not very loud. Then it went away.

"But I will never forget the sounds it made.

"The second night, the same thing happened. Only, this time, Herb," thought Colt, "the wind slammed shutters, spilled down my chimney throwing soot, whisking out the fire in a flood of sparks.

"The first two nights weren't bad. I cocked my head, listened, amused to think I heard faint voices singing on the wind. But the third and fourth nights I changed my mind. It grew worse. The fifth night the wind returned and stayed on and on, blowing and blowing until dawn. I remember what happened when I dared to open the door a moment. . . .

"The wind came *eagerly* in. . . ."

Colt stanced himself resolutely. He was not old. Thirty, moonlight mantelling his lean, intent face, his thick black hair and dark eyes. For the present he did not recognize fear, he rubbed shoulders with curiosity, but tired resignation was its bed-companion.

Eventually it would have snared him no matter what he did. He'd had plenty of warning to flee. But, he shrugged, why bother? He'd make his stand here.

The wind was almost tangible, rushing from tree to tree, faster, faster and yet faster. Rising, roaring, rising like a great translucent fist, ready to crush down upon the house, ready to sweep it all away.

But that was not its purpose. It didn't want the house. It didn't want the house at all.

It wanted Colt.

THE wind went up. It elevated, freeing itself like an invisible prehistoric bird from the elms. Great tidal waves of atmosphere punched trunks and worried branches aside.

It screamed earthward, down to the open door. Straight for the door, straight for Colt!

Instantly, Colt's arm flicked up, snatched the door, slammed it. Locks *thungged* sharp into niches. Bolts rapped home!

A second late, the wind fell in a lethal avalanche, titanic and bone-shaking. The house heaved, groaned, as the air flung hard shoulders against it!

Colt staggered, the laugh from his lips crippled at birth. "Damn you, *damn* you! I fooled you. I fooled you again!"

He limped against the door, gasping. His brain was a steaming riot; what would have happened if the locks had failed, if he had not moved with a snap? . . .

Eyes distended, he pinioned the door unnecessarily with spread-eagled body, laughter not his own dropping from his mouth.

"You thought I'd let you in tonight, didn't you?" he choked. "Thought I was through. But I had everything ready, waiting. You won't get me, by the gods. You can't—you *won't!*"

The fury flanked the house with resounding echoes. A great vacuum machine nuzzled at the gables. Shutters leaped open, clattered; tiny breaking wings—clipped off. Trees doubled up as if attacked, struck in the vitals.

Colt abandoned the door, hurried to a window. The wind followed. It was all about the house, but its volcanic head looked after Colt, pressed a hard shifting face against the panes.

The window glass whined a crystal song of strain and stress.

"You can't break it!" jeered Colt. "You can't. It's new, unbreakable! I made sure of that yesterday."

The intangible thing outside followed him from window to window and then from room to room, pressing and mourning.

Colt stopped, struck by a strange thought. He gave it to the wind:

"You're a big hound run amuck," he cried. "You're the damndest, biggest prehistoric killer that ever hunted prey. A big sniffling hound, trying to smell me out, find me. You push your big cold nose up to the house, taking air, and when you find me in the parlor you drive your pressure there, and when I'm in the kitchen you fling your power there. A big invisible beast with the muscles of the mad winds, damn you!"

In reply, the night shrieked with all the agony of death. The wind seemed to razor the very gown of night, ripping it to shreds, shaking stars, trembling the shaded earth.

It tore at the roof with quick, hard fingers, quested under the house to hiss through floor-chinks. A whip of cold flicked Colt's legs.

"Get back, curse you!" He blundered away from a side door.

HE RAN from room to room, upstairs and down, switching on lights; and the wind watched him, moved with him. The house flamed with light, brilliantly garish amidst a whirlpooling night.

Colt stopped long enough, coming down the hall stair, to light his pipe. He made a rigid ceremony of it, trying to steady his fingers. The flame fluttered. A cold draft snuffed it out.

Colt tried again, succeeding. The pipe glowed. He blew smoke and the draft whisked it away in a quick billow.

The wind smote the house again and again. It fell, it leaned, it thrust. It whined through the screen door, but Colt made no move to satisfy it, so it jerked a screen off in a frenzy of strength, shattered it across the dark lawn.

A strong house, thought Colt, and he was glad he had ordered reinforcements for certain portions of it; new wood, new steel, new locks.

The harried trees were flung one way and another, riding whips cracked by a Jovian fist.

BACK in the living room, before the warming electric fire-log, Colt picked up a book. One of the books he had written on hurricanes, typhoons and other colossal forces. He thumbed through it, stopping at the dedication:

"This book is written by one who has seen, but who has always escaped. It is dedicated to those who lost the game of elements. . . ."

Always escaped? No—not always. Tonight . . .

The printed page misted, flowed, garbled. Colt's pipe went out. When he tried

to light it again he could not. He set the book on his lap and began reading.

And then a draft of wind, small, almost imperceptible, fingered the pages. It turned them idly, thoughtfully, one by one. Over and over and over. Colt watched it work its will with the pages, stiffened and hypnotized. His fingers jerked. He seized the book and dashed it to the hearth, cursing.

The wind mocked him, tenderly stroking his brow with a slim finger.

Colt flung himself into the hall, tore down a huge drapery, jammed it against the door, under which the draft came hissing and laughing.

"I'll throttle you—I'll stop your tongue!"

And then, tired: "Go away, damn you." Weakly. "Go away. Let a mortal live."

A grinding noise. Something crackled like thick dry bones. A pause. A rustling, thumping terrific crash. The lights went out—the room plunged into a howling dark-pit. The power poles lay slaughtered by the wind. The electric grate, glowing faintly, died, too, in the black room. The words Colt babbled were meaningless, like an hysterical child.

FUMBLING, Colt struck a match; light played over a face aged twenty years. The lonely flame threw light over something that gleamed dully. The phone! Maybe— The phone wires had been connected to other poles. If the line was still intact . . .

"Operator!" Colt waited. Response, "Yes, sir?"

"Thank God, thank God, thank God—operator, give me Trinity 9929."

"Trinity 9929?"

"Yes. And hurry, for Lord's—"

A pause. The phone on the other end was ringing. It was ringing. It was ringing! *Click.*

"Herb Thompson speaking."

"Herb? Herb!" Insane with relief.

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Herb—Herb, this is Colt—"

"John? Your voice, I didn't recognize—"

"I haven't time! Listen. I want you to do something for me—"

"Anything. What's wrong? You sound—"

CLICK!

"Herb, there's a localized storm outside. A great wind. It wants me. It wants *me!* Alive! Are you listening?" A rapid rattle of the hook. "Herb." A rattle. "Herb?" Pause. Shouting, *"Herb!"*

Silence.

The wind moved outside. It had won again. Won again. First the lights—now the phone.

"Operator, I've been cut off! Operator, oper—it's no use. NO DAMNED USE! God curse you, damn you, kill you—take this!" He ripped the phone from its wiring, heaved it at a window. He realized his error too late to stop it. The phone struck only partially, splintering glass into a crystal web, breaking a small hole.

The wind tongued in, taking advantage of the small egress. Colt damned the hole with a plug of wadded drapery. He stood raging, frightened, bitter. Alone. Alone. Eyes wide and every fiber in him aquiver.

"You want me alive, don't you? Alive. You don't dare knock the house down in one fell blow. No, that would kill me, and you want me alive—so you can rip me apart finger by finger and muscle by muscle. Or do you want what's inside me—my mind—my brain—my mind—"

HE FALTERED to a stop, shocked by truth. He put a hand to his brow. "My *mind*. That's it. You want it, don't you?"

"You don't care for the husk that cradles the mind, but you want the intellect. You covet my thought, my life power, my ego. The psychic force, the power of thought

and existence—you want all those because that is what you are, aren't you?"

He drew in a long, aching breath. His eyes coursed tears and his cheeks were wet. And he cursed the wind.

"That's what you are, a big cloud of vapors, atoms, winds from every corner of the earth—the same wind that ripped the Celebes ten years ago, the same pampero that killed in Argentina, the typhoon that fed well in Hawaii, and the hurricane that devastated the coast of Africa last year! You're all of them, part of each, part of those tempests I escaped.

"Only, something happened to give you a start in the direction of alien life. Or maybe the Winds have always been this way; more than hot and cold currents. You want power, like mine. You want intellect. *I* could do you more good or harm than others, for I know your feeding ground, I know where you are born and where you expire. You don't want death, like other winds. You want life, to get me out of the way because I *know*.

"I can tell the world of your cruelty, tell them how to parry and defeat you, as I have done in books! But you don't want my preaching any more. You can use me for your *own* purposes! Incorporate me into your huge cold carcass, give you knowledge, purpose, direction! You want me on *your* side!"

COLT laughed again, lungs tired and broken from laughing and shouting against the dinning. The house shook like a slipper in a puppy's mouth.

"You'll have to tear the house down bit by bit! And I'll duel you tooth and nail all the way—like I fought you in Ceylon. When I started a forest fire, the one thing that survives and feeds on wind, combatting it. I licked you then, and I'll do it again!"

The house shook once more and the crumbling started.

The front wall bulged in. Glass splintered but did not break. Colt, face swollen from emotion, turned, scrambling for the kitchen.

He dared look once as the kitchen door sealed behind—saw the parlor wall buckle, spew in as if rammed by an artillery shell. The wind stabbed through, howling in triumph.

The kitchen door barely shut before the wind's shoulder was against it. The frail lock could not hold. Colt fought against straining hinges. Giving up, he jerked the cellar door agape, leaped down, bolted it.

Bomber fragments of kitchen door shrapneled everywhere. Gas mains tore loose, spurted gas that blazed into fire.

The upper floor of the house tore away like the simultaneous ripping of ten million yards of muslin.

Colt gritted his teeth, held to the door. Blood ran from his nostrils. He fought idiocy, fought the wind with his mind.

"You can't get me—you can't! I'd hide until you rip the floor up, board by board—then I'll burrow in the ground like an animal and escape! Like I did in Alexandria years ago, like I did in Nairobi! I'll burrow!"

The wind paid no heed. There were voices in it. Voices of the gale, bora and bayamo. Wretched callings, pleadings of the siroccos and tempests. They pleaded with Colt, commanding, telling, urging, ordering him to give himself up.

These were the tongues of ten thousand killed in a typhoon, seven thousand slaughtered by a hurricane, three thousand engulfed by a cyclone. Twisted and tortured and flung from continent to continent on the backs and in the bellies of monsoons and whirlwinds. Wandering in rains and showers, in snows and hails, racked by thunder, pelted by water, fettered and bodiless.

Moulded. Moulded from one million disenthroned spirits into one voice. And

that voice, one of darkness and power, now demanded but yet another sacrifice.

In respite, the wind slowed. It quelled over the conquered rubble of wood, plaster and sharded glass. It roved through the crippled ruin, biding time. It languished outside the cellar, singing a blank versed melody in a score of keys.

And the singing was only broken by the sobbing from the cellar. There was a great silence after the maelstrom. A silence punctuated by weeping and the anxious hiss of the wind.

Colt would not come out.

The cellar floor was dirt. He lay on it, looking up, face streaked with dirt, sweaty, lined and haggard. "Come and get me," he husked.

SCRABBLING at the soil, raking a shallow trench for his body, he attempted to burrow to crouch in. His fingernails tore and bled. He ached. He longed to rest.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. A coil of rope lay in a corner. He clutched it, threw a snake of it up over one quivering rafter. The kitchen flooring gave, creaking, bit by bit. In five minutes . . .

As the rope came raveling down, Colt tied a quick noose in it, hard and sure. Just far enough off the floor to . . .

Next, a keg of nails, rolled and rocked into place. Colt stepped up. This was escape. He reached for the noose.

The wind flicked the noose away from his fingers. A small hand of wind somehow had crept into the cellar from above, and now it flung the rope wildly in circles.

"Give it to me! The rope, you fool, the rope!" Colt tried to catch the madly dancing hemp-line. But the wind threw it out of reach, zig-zagging it from side to side and back and forth. A lurch from Colt—the rope flew away, came back to rap his face, then out again.

Desperation. Colt snatched, cursed, snatched again. Time grew short. So little time to escape. A snatch — a miss. And —

He caught the rope. The wind died. Died as if only playing a game. It waited. Colt wondered why. But taking advantage of the cessation, he thrust his head into the noose.

"You can't have me alive, you can't have my life-force!" he cried. "I'm getting away —I'm getting away—NOW!"

Colt leaped, kicking the nail-keg with frantic feet. The rope sang, wiring his throat in strangulation.

"I have won," his misting brain exalted, "I have won!"

But immediately, the rafters upon which the rope depended, sagged inward, shrieking, slowly, slowly, certainly.

With cracking thunder the rafters, pulled by Colt's weight, gave way, opening, opening an entrance for the wind.

The rafters collapsed, the floor caved and flew apart. Colt fell, sprawled, choking in the dirt.

"All right, God damn you!" He stiffened up, raging. "Here I am—*take me!*"

The wind howled. . . .

"THE LINES ARE DOWN, SIR."

"Are you sure, operator? I was cut off in the middle of my call."

Herb Thompson laid the phone back in its cradle and leaned against the writing desk, shaking his head. "I can't figure it out. No storm. A little wind, maybe, but—" He took his coat off an armchair and shrugged into it. "Think I'll drive out Colt's way, have a look-see. He sounded strange. But, that's his way. May be on his way here now, with another of his cracked theories. Liable to pop up any time."

Herb Thompson was undecided. He stood, wavering, considering, hat in hand. Faintly, a rapping came, on the front door. "Eh?" Herb started, listening. The knock

was repeated. "Who's knocking at this time of—"

Thompson hurried across his den, out into the hall, where he stopped again, alert. "Huh." Faintly, he heard laughter. "Of course." Herb grinned hugely. "I'd know his laughter anywhere. It's Colt. He came when he was cut off, couldn't wait till morning to tell me his confounded tall-tales." Thompson chuckled as he marched to the front door. "Glad he's here. Probably brought some friends with him. Sounds like a lot of other people laughing."

Thompson opened the front door.

"Come on in, Colt!"

The porch was vacant.

Thompson showed no surprise, his face grew amusedly sly. He laughed. "Colt? Now, none of your tricks! Come on." He switched on the porch-light and peered out and around. "Where are you, Colt?"

No answer.

Thompson waited a moment, suddenly chilled to the marrow. He stepped out on the porch and looked uneasily about, very carefully.

A sudden wind caught, whipped his coat, disheveled his hair. He thought he heard laughter again.

The wind died down, sad, mourning, passing away, away, going back far out to the sea, to the Celebes, to Nairobi, to Sumatra and Cape Horn. Fading, fading, fading. Laughing.

Thompson shrugged. He went in and closed the door, shivering.

"That's funny . . ." he said.

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Corey's Cat

By HARRY RAYMOND

THE ending of my affair with Mrs. Corey was messy enough, but what happened to John Brown, my Scottie, ugly as that was, saved me from a worse conclusion. John Brown, throughout all the deplorable business, showed himself subtler and wiser than his master. Beasts are more aware of some kinds of reality than humans.

John Brown and I both approved highly of the little cottage on the pond's edge; John because the surrounding pines were full of red squirrels that chattered defiantly at him, and I because this quiet place high in the hills seemed to be just the spot I wanted for my six weeks of convalescent loafing. Overwork, breakdown, and a touch of stomach ulcers.

It was dusk when I finished unpacking, and found that the shed containing the generating set was locked and there were no lights. It was a long half mile around the pond to the central lodge where the occupants of the cottages ate their meals, and I didn't feel up to walking that far. A few hundred yards away my nearest neighbor's lights winked softly on, and through the pines John Brown and I walked in search of a phone.

A small man in a dull red lounging jacket answered my tap on the door. I couldn't see his face clearly because he wore a long green eye shade which cast an emerald lambency over his features. I had an impression that under this odd light, his facial muscles were moving nervously like little fish seen far down in water.

"My name is Martin," I said. "I'm your next door neighbor for a few weeks. I'd like to use your phone if you have one."

"Of course," he answered, opening the door. His hands were long for such a small man. He shut the door before John Brown could get in. "Right there. My name's Corey."

I made my call to the central lodge.

"Sit down," said Mr. Corey. "Smoke?"

We chatted as strangers might. Soon, with the directness of one possessed by his subject, he told me of his work. He had written a history of necromancy in America, and he was expecting a batch of proofs in a day or so.

"An odd field," he said with a little self-conscious snigger. "But I come by it honestly. My ancestors came from Salem village." He paused.

I could see I was expected to say something, and I did come up with the right thing. "You're descended from that Giles Corey?" I asked. "The one they pressed under a door during the witchcraft trials?"

He giggled. "Yes. It must have been a definitely messy business."

"It certainly was a useless one," I said, lighting up again.

He looked at me quickly under his long green shade. "Oh, I don't know," he said in swift protest. "Ever read Montagu Somers? Do you know his thesis that witches still like cellar hollows where houses were once and still work mischief? As a matter of fact, I have made an experiment myself." He stopped as if he had said more than he meant to say.

From the door, John Brown growled as I have never heard him growl. He was staring into the room, his hackles stiff. I followed his look.

An enormous tortoise shell cat, splendid

There are only two kinds of danger—one is physical, and the other spiritual. This man faced both. . . .

in yellow and black, slid into the room. She looked at me, and John's rumbling was even deeper. Her eyes flickered briefly at John and back to me. I had a swift, eerie sensation of being appraised and approved.

"A beauty," I said to Corey.

"She is," said Corey. He seemed to be moved with an inward mirth. "And she likes you."

The cat leaped purring to the arm of my chair. She peered into my face, and then

laid a paw on my forearm. As she spread her toes, I could see that her claws were painted scarlet.

Corey caught my look. "A whim of my wife's," he said. "But not unbecoming, what?"

"No," I said, as the cat started to settle down in my lap. At this John Brown set up such a dolorous noise that I stood up, putting the cat gently aside. "I'm afraid John Brown's behaving badly. He doesn't like cats, and I've already trespassed on your time. Thank you."

THE cat undulated to the door and John Brown shrank as far as his pride would let him. Something of deep enmity, so palpable that even dull humans could get it, went between the two. John trembled all the way home.

The sun was high and hot next morning and I lay on the strip of beach soaking in the heat. John was back in the shade.

"Hello," said a woman's voice. "I'm Mrs. Corey, your neighbor. Do you mind company?"

I opened my eyes, said "Hello," mechanically and blinked, and not only from the bright sunlight. Mrs. Corey tossed aside her beach wrap and lay down on the sand beside me. Her face was warm amber, and her hair was black and silky, faintly curled. I got up on one elbow. "Not at all," I said.

Mrs. Corey had a gorgeous body and she was utterly candid about it. She lay face downward, her head on her forearms, her eyes on me. Her swim suit was black satin, and the contrast of it with her golden skin was a color symphony that vaguely made me think of something. An inasmuch as the upper section of it was a mere dark thread across the subtle curvings of her back, the result was that no man, not even a bloodless convalescent like myself, could look on it and have any more interest in the vivid scenery of the mountain lake.

John Brown elected to spoil the meeting. He came slow and bristling across the sand, his voice dark with hate.

I got up. "My dog's a nuisance," I said. "Will you excuse me for a moment?" I dragged poor John to the shed, locked him in, and came back. "Sorry," I apologized, and lay down on the hot sand.

In a week, I was far gone in infatuation. It wasn't love, I'm sure, for I never respected her because of the cold-blooded way she went after a tired lonely shell of a man like myself. And I grew to have, swelling side by side with my desire for her, a growing formless fear. Even in my foolishness, I knew that Mrs. Corey was very dangerous.

I WAS thoroughly ashamed of myself, of course, not only because I was such a pushover, but because my wife was working hard in town to keep me up in the hills. But shame and decency were helpless before the thing that was burning in me. I must have been pretty obvious about it all, for when I had been there about two weeks, I went over to ask the Corey's to be my guest at a stock company's show down in the valley, and I found that Corey knew.

"Mrs. Corey isn't available evenings," he said, his face inscrutable under the long green visor. He paused, then said, "Sit down, Martin." He waited a while, playing with his fingertips, and spoke like a lecturer. "There are two kinds of danger," he said, looking at the ceiling, "the one is physical, the other spiritual. There are situations where both exist."

I was in a mood to be blunt. "Irate husband oils up his gun?" I asked.

He shook his head. A deep pitying sadness was strong on his weirdly-lighted face. "I won't explain," he said, "and you wouldn't believe me if I did. Suppose we let it go that you are in danger. Why don't you go somewhere else?"

I stood up. Shame and confusion make

a man foolishly stubborn. "I'm staying," I said, "Till I get ready to go."

He made a gesture as though he were washing his long white hands. "I did what I could," he said. He seemed to be reminiscing rather than talking to me. He got up. "Sorry we can't accept your offer."

"Good night," I said stiffly, and went back to my cabin.

NEXT morning Mrs. Corey and I walked along the narrow strip of beach until we came to the little outlet of the pond. Lying motionless in six inches of crystal water was a trout, red speckles vivid against the snowy sand.

Mrs. Corey seemed to breathe swiftly. "Could you scoop him out?" she whispered.

I shook my head. "Doctor told me once I had the fastest reflexes he ever saw," I said, "but I can't move the way a trout does."

"Look," she breathed. She knelt swiftly, and the concave arching line of her back was superb. Slowly she lowered her hand toward the water's surface, her slim fingers claw-curved, the scarlet pointed nails gleaming. A curious slow writhing rippled along her spine. I watched her with tolerant amusement, knowing the speed of a startled trout.

Mrs. Corey struck with a scooping motion. With bewildering speed she swung on her knees and pounced with both hands on the trout that flopped madly on the sloping shore.

"You got him!" I gasped unbelievingly. Then I stopped, for my back crawled with gooseflesh.

Still on her hands and knees, Mrs. Corey was smiling at me. Between her sharp white teeth the trout was a green and white spasm of motion. I looked away just in time, but I couldn't help hearing the crunching noise.

I got hold of myself in a moment and turned to Mrs. Corey again. In that instant I realized what it was about her face that had been troubling me. When I looked straight at her face, her mouth was sober, serious, but when I saw her profile she always seemed to be faintly amused.

"I'll have to be going," I stammered, "I must get the noon train." I had a feeling that I wanted to be sick.

She moved close to me. "You're going home?"

"For a check-up," I said, pulling away a little.

"You'll see your wife?" Her eyes had a slit-like cast, but this may have been due to the fact that she was looking into the bright sun as she peered up at me.

"Yes, of course," I answered. Then, not wisely, but because I could think of nothing else, "Will you look after John Brown for me? I'll have to leave him locked up."

She smiled. "I'll look after him tonight. Hurry back."

I thought that I had myself well in hand when I came up to my cabin two days later. I opened the door and stepped into the room where bluebottles buzzed resonantly.

John Brown was lying in the center of the floor, dead.

I moved to kneel beside him, and to my sick rage I saw that he had no eyes. Whatever had killed him had literally clawed his eyes out. Poor John had died like a wolf, with his teeth fast locked, and between his fangs were tufts of hair, black and tawny.

I FOUND myself knocking savagely on Corey's door. Corey answered, his green shade incongruous in the bright daylight.

"What's the matter, Martin?" he asked, for my anger and horror must have been plain on my face. "What's happened?"

"Where's your cat?" I demanded. My voice was a harsh croak.

Corey sighed before answering. "Oh," he said in a sad, tired voice. "So that's it."

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He exhaled. "I don't know. That cat is never around in daytime."

"She's killed my dog," I said. My hands were trembling.

Mrs. Corey answered, sliding from her bedroom. She had on a black silk house coat, and her hair was tied with yellow ribbons of an odd hue.

"Oh, that's too bad," she said. Her face was toward me and her mouth grave and serious. "He was all right when I left him out for his run last night."

"Where's your cat?" I repeated, stupidly. "You've got no right to let a creature like that loose."

"We can't do much about it now," said Corey, the same sadness still in his voice. He shuffled some sheets of paper together. "Or perhaps we can." He seemed to be talking to himself.

"She always seems to do this sort of thing when the moon is nearing full," said Mrs. Corey. "We can't control her." She was not looking at me, and seen from the side, her mouth was curved in that fixed enigmatic smile.

"I'll have to do something, I'm afraid," said Corey. "We can't let her keep this up." He drew a deep breath of resolve. "Would you mind doing something for me, Martin? Even though it seems an imposition on top of all this, will you correct these proofs? This afternoon?" He held out the bundle of papers.

Despite my anger I could see that the little man was moved. Behind his eyes I could sense something pleading with me to take the proof sheets. He kept his tone casual, but his face, turned away from his wife, was desperate.

I took the sheets. "I shall be glad to look them over," I said coldly. "Good afternoon."

An hour later I had returned from giving John Brown decent burial under a blasted pine on a hill crest. Sorrow and wrath were strong tides in me as I sat in my room with my hands balled into fists. The door opened and light steps pattered across the room. I didn't need to look up.

Mrs. Corey put her arm about my shoulders.

"He's gone to town. He'll be gone all the afternoon. I came over to tell you how sorry I was." She pressed against my shoulder and the warmth of her body came through her single covering of black silk.

I turned to look at her. Her house coat was open and in the V of the neckline, I could see an ugly red scratch scored on the blond tintings of her skin. I did not know that I had the capacity to loathe anybody or anything as I loathed her at that moment. I had been thinking hard the last hour.

I stared full at her. I said, "Go away!"

Our eyes were glittering swords, crossed. Her face was full of fresh fury, and her red lips were drawn tightly back over her white teeth. I was so full of a cold pure hate that I couldn't be afraid, though a sensible man would have shuddered at the things that moved deep down in her opalescent eyes.

Silently she moved to the door. She stood there a moment, lovely as a coral snake, full of beauty and death. Then she was gone and never a word had she spoken.

I felt, with my dismissal, as though some dreadful menace had gone from me. But now, after my visit home, and after the death of John Brown, I felt that any association with her was infinitely perverse and deadly, a peril to the soul. Dimly I began to understand what Corey had been talking about.

I tried to work, after I had collected my thoughts, on Corey's proofs, but with little success. They were full of necromantic nonsense: Why the cold iron of a horseshoe over the door keeps witches away; how werewolves and werecats can only be killed with silver implements, and a vast deal of similar run-of-the-mill rubbish. But I promised that I would read it, and I did. Toward the end of the pages there was more pertinent material.

I dined at the lodge that evening. Across the dining-room I could see Corey, his shade off for once, and weariness and despair were clear on his face for anyone to see. Mrs. Corey was busy with her rare steak and never once did she look my way.

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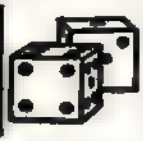

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THE moon was an immense flattened orange over the hills as I went back to my room to wait. I suppose I should have been frightened, but there is room in a man's heart for only one strong emotion at a time, and I was too full of vengeance for fear to get in. The moon came higher, and the lodge orchestra began to play.

It is strange how even civilization and years of soft living cannot strip from a man those things nature has put in him for his preservation. Even with the orchestra going I heard the padding, and I was ready when Corey's cat appeared on my window-sill, sinister against the pale moon, glowing eyes yellow holes in her black silhouette.

I walked around the edge of the pond a little later. From the kitchen door of the lodge I saw a light shining. The steward emerged for a drag on a cigarette.

"Good evening," I said. "You're working late."

He swore gently. "Checking the silver," he said. "I think somebody swiped a steak knife."

"Too bad," I sympathized. "By the way, would you mind if I washed my hands in your sink?"

"Not at all," he said. "There's soap and a towel."

He came in as I finished washing. He gave an exclamation of delight and stooped. "There's that everlasting toad-sticker now," he said. "How'd I miss it?"

"We all of us miss a lot of things sometimes," I said. "Thanks for letting me wash my hands."

"That's all right, sir," he said.

I went back to town next morning. Corey really needn't have sent me a marked copy of the local paper telling of the murder of his wife, whose body was found, a few days after I left, under a blasted pine on a hilltop, her throat cut. All the metropolitan papers were full of it, and the details of the rather hopeless search for the killer.

It was very decent of Corey to let that time elapse. I hope he isn't a talker.

Fever and Fantasy

VERNE CHUTE sent us along this interesting story behind his story, "Flight Into Destiny." The strange functioning of the human mind under the influence of fever and sickness is an experience that some of us have had. The distorted perspective and ghoulish images conjured up by a feverish nightmare can sometimes rival the wildest flights of a fantasy writer's imagination.

Mr. Chute's letter follows:

The strange and inexplicable always has been of great interest to me, as has the peculiar workings of the mind under the influence of certain maladies. Tropical fever, especially. Pouring its toxic potency into the blood, tropical fever exerts a mesmeric influence that sometimes leads man into strange, off-the-trail journeys, opening certain doors heretofore closed to him.

So when, in *Flight Into Destiny,* a staid young business man in a lofty office building in New York is suddenly afflicted with tropical fever, something is bound to happen. Especially if this certain type of fever is known only to a small, closed-in area far up the Amazon River.

Of an ancestry traceable back to the days of Eric the Red, this character could not lose himself in profits and business. His nostrils quivered to other things—the tang of the wind from off the sea, the inspiration of the picture of the yellow-haired viking on the wall above his desk. Under the spell of the fever he rushed straight for the Amazon, fighting odds and delays like a madman. Was he not

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on his way to save the life of a Scandinavian princess in the depths of a South American wilderness? And, only one person did he take with him to this forbidden section—the writer.

But leaving the esoteric for the more practical and personal, a paragraph or so of my own qualifications. After leaving school, I had the uncontrollable desire to see what things were all about. In hunting for my niche I worked experimentally at many different vocations, with none seeming to be the right one. Declining a position in my father's jewelry store, I worked on a farm, in hotels, canneries, as a salesman, for a time as rider for a cattle outfit, and even as a shipping clerk in an Arizona power company. I gave the latter up because of lack of appreciation. I thought I was doing all right until a pair of boots were returned which I had sent out to a line rider. His curt note was included—"My feet are both the same size." But perhaps my most interesting job was driving a truck on the Mexican Border. There was much shipping to do from the Mexican side. Often I would pull a load of merchandise into the Mexican customs and have to wait all day for it to be checked over. This gave me much time to pry into the secrets of the Border town.

Ten years went into the new, old and out-of-print book business, and it was during this stage of my life that I was bitten by the writing bug. The out-of-print section of the business probably was the real reason for my desertion of the straight and narrow, for in this category were to be found the more flavorsome books which in scope were both mystical and esoteric. . . . When my writing greedily took up more and more of my time, something happened to the book business . . . I hardly remember its passing, so gently and completely did it fade away.

And in parting, thanks for listening. I deem it a great privilege to be able to express myself through the pages of the *Eyrie* and through the fictional medium of WEIRD TALES.

Verne Chute

Says Mr. Price to Mr. Bloch

IN THE November *Eyrie*, Robert Bloch was pleading that "we fantasy writers are a pretty normal gang, after all." Then Mr.

Bloch proceeded to take several of the best known fantasy writers and describe them as very normal, average looking people. In the course of this, Robert Bloch stated that E. Hoffmann Price looked like a lawyer. Mr. Price ran across this statement and had something to say to Bloch, incorporating it into his letter to us.

Voting on the best yarn in an issue is dreary stuff. And since I've read, thus far, only *Nursemaid to Nightmares,* I can't make comparisons. But it's the craziest and the most delightful thing in the fantasy line I've read in ages, if ever! He must have done it with a ouija board, he couldn't possibly have done it on purpose. And I hope he has another seizure soon. Utterly mad, of course, but no end of fun.

Now, a matter of ethics may be involved here. It doesn't look right, one writer boosting another. Looks like a put-up job. But let's get this straight—Bloch has never, to the best of my knowledge, written me a fan letter. So there's no reciprocity. Second place, the guy's no friend of mine, so even if he had asked me to plug for his story, which he didn't, I'd not have obliged him. For while I am not one to hold grudges, I am inclined to be somewhat bitter about what he said about me in the current *Eyrie.* He's quite right about Derleth, Kuttner, and his accuracy about Moore is phenomenally correct. Not a bad score. But me—

A lawyer!

Some day, I'm going to demand satisfaction for that one, if he'll meet me in New Orleans, at the Duelling Oaks. Sword or pistol—on horse or on foot—or both! The truth is, I look like a Moslem saint. Indeed, I AM one. Some day I'll send you a picture to prove it. Long black beard and everything.

So I'm no friend of Bloch. Not after that quip. But I did like the yarn, lots, and being free from malice, I admit I liked it. And am looking for more.

Yours,

E. Hoffmann Price

In the WEIRD TALES CLUB columns in January, we published a letter by Adam W. Gros

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sette in which the writer complained that nothing really weird had ever happened to him, and that much as he enjoyed fantasy fiction, he was inclined to believe that all tales of ghosts and strange happenings could be explained on natural grounds.

Since we published that letter we have been nearly deluged by persons wishing to register their vote pro or con in this matter. Following, we print the views of three of our readers on Mr. Grossette's ideas.

From Brooklyn, N. Y., Alexander MacDowell writes the following:

In answer to Mr. Grossette's letter which appeared in the January issue of WEIRD TALES, I wish to say that I cannot blame him for being skeptical regarding matters pertaining to the occult when there are so many charlatans who offer their wares to Truth Seekers at bargain prices.

However, it is a delicate subject and most people refrain from discussions of this nature in fear of ridicule, thus, many interesting happenings are never brought to light.

As for the haunted house, I have lived in dwellings which possessed some strange qualities. Those who possess little or no knowledge of the occult may term these happenings to a creative imagination, but from personal experience I am convinced that it is not all imagination.

In regards to witchcraft and its powers, I wish to say that there is nothing supernatural about it, yet it can be worked upon the superstitious with deadly results, but in no way can it harm the disbeliever.

I agree with you, Mr. Grossette, the occult makes wonderful material for the writers of fiction, the facts have been proven many times in the pages of WEIRD TALES. This old world is full of strange and unaccountable happenings if we will only look around for them. I will be pleased to hear from others of like opinions.

Jim Mulligan of New York City weighs in with this:

In the many issues of WEIRD TALES that I have read—and I haven't missed since 1938—

I have never seen a letter that interested me as much as Adam Grossette's in the January issue. I think Mr. Grossette stated the case for many of us avid fantasy readers very capably.

I have read fantasy stories, all I could get, for more years than I care to remember. Yet with all my fondness for this type of fiction and for all my willingness to accept an author's most incredible flights of imagination, I, like Mr. Grossette, have never spied a real ghost or come across anything that could really be called supernatural.

However, there are people I know who swear that they have experienced occult incidents. Now who's wrong, anyway?

Another slant is taken by Ivan Scofield, writing to us from Portland, Oregon. We give the following excerpts from his letter:

So Adam W. Grossette has never seen a ghost or a witch. The truth is that he has probably seen a lot of them. If he cares to investigate he will find that half the world believes in witchcraft and the other half isn't as skeptical as it might be.

He is right on one point. The supernatural does not exist. Everything is natural. Men call the unknown supernatural, because they don't understand the natural law responsible for it.

In the middle ages a witch was a wise woman with a knowledge of herbs to whom people went for medicine when they were sick. Today we have physicians. . . .

The point of the argument is that the supernatural ceases to be supernatural once you understand it. . . .

READERS' VOTE

FLIGHT INTO DESTINY	THE WHISPERING WINE
A BARGAIN WITH THE DEAD	LIL
NO LIGHT FOR UNCLE HENRY	UNDER YOUR SPELL
THE BOOK AND THE BEAST	A BOTTLE OF GIN
	THE WIND
	COREY'S CAT

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best. Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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I TRAINED THE MEN WHO THEN GOT THESE BIG JOBS

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WEIRD TALES CLUB

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WRITE TO MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you get together with other fantasy and science-fiction fans. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

Another Legend?

I was very much interested in Bert Slater's letter, in last issue's WEIRD TALES column, on the Superstition Mountains.

I'd be very much interested, and I'm sure other readers would, to hear just what Mr. Slater found out.

There is a place somewhere up in Southern New England called The Port of Missing Men. It is a wooded spot on the top of a high hill. I visited it quite some time ago and heard various grisly explanations for its being named as it is. I wonder if any of your readers know the true legend back of this place.

Incidentally, although being a New Englander by birth I am probably prejudiced, I think for every spot the Southwest can dig up that is haunted, or pretends to be, in Old New England, you can find two such places.

Frank Wilsie

Bedford, N. Y.

One reader has definite ideas about the slant our stories should take.

Mrs. A. E. André writes from Placerville, California:

Invite stories for teaching a moral—preserve your survival. There is a natural mysticism and there is a spiritual mysticism—and the natural

mysticism and the spiritual mysticism are governed by their respective natural and spiritual laws—that is irrefutable.

Magazines are crashing, war hysteria is making room for the phenomenal influences, and God is at the wheel—guiding the procession of the uninformed. Have a try at it yourself, and—save WEIRD TALES from a collapse, among the rest. Have stories wherein the plots show that greed and selfishness drag a victim—who doesn't understand to Death. Appreciatively yours, for a boon of WEIRD TALES.

Mrs. A. E. André.

Has Enjoyed WEIRD TALES Since 1925

I would like to join the Weird Tales Club, please. I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for years. In fact, I think it was in 1925 or 1926 when I got acquainted with W.T. I've enjoyed it ever since. That was when it was a monthly. It's hard to wait two months, but anyway it's a fine magazine. I'd like to hear from other club members; will try to answer all letters and exchange snapshots. I'm a crazy camera bug. But a fellow is liable to be two or three crazy bugs if he reads many stories like *Spider Mansion*. Eh, what?

Yours truly,

S. P. Klepper.

Rogersville, Tenn., Route 3

NEW MEMBERS

James Miller, 521 Welty St., Greensburg, Pa.
James L. Kepner, Jr., 1495 O'Farrell St., San Francisco, Calif.
Max Ehrlich, 1271 E. 9th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Marceline Tolboe, 419 E. 97th St., Inglewood, Calif.
George Bonpas, Box 13, Alameda, Calif.
Louis Bratman, 3229 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.
Dorothy R. Frederick, Wood St., Harmony, Pa.
Donna Markle, 1219 E. LaBrea Dr., Inglewood, Calif.
Porzia Gregory, 306 7th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
John H. Hunt, 395 Meridian St., E. Boston, Mass.
Barney Krauxil, 285 E. 142nd St., N. Y. City
Annie Laurie, LaPrade, 120 Wood Ave., Schoolfield, Virginia
Mrs. Ruth Geiso, 5040 A Delmar, St. Louis, Mo.
Jerry Pickell, 324 S. Brainard St., Naperville, Ill.
Esther Bingham, R. D. No. 2, Central Square, N. Y.
Jane Bush, R. D. No. 2, Central Square, N. Y.
George E. Turner, 3704 Van Buren St., Amarillo, Tex.
Dalton A. Wells, 2804 Sixth St., Detroit, Mich.
Alice Weekner, 920 W. Blackwell Ave., Blackwell, Oklahoma
Murriel Ellis, 702 N. Maple St., Lancaster, Ohio
J. Wyrzykowski, 132 W. 113th St., Chicago, Ill.
Martin H. Yaeger, 281 Van Buren St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Alfred Menard, 7048 S. Eggleston, Chicago, Ill.
Vivian Hoffbauer, 8500 Albertson Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
Joseph F. Selinger, 8500 Albertson Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.
Peter Crockford, Kendall, Florida
Gilbert Morten, Storm Gate, Iowa
Arlene Reves, c/o W. G. Lambert, Pursglove, W. Va.
Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Williams, Box 237, Rt. 2, Paulsbo, Wash.
John Fehner, 122-16 22nd Ave., College Point, N. Y.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next week.

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He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Powers are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book." Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

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This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

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This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

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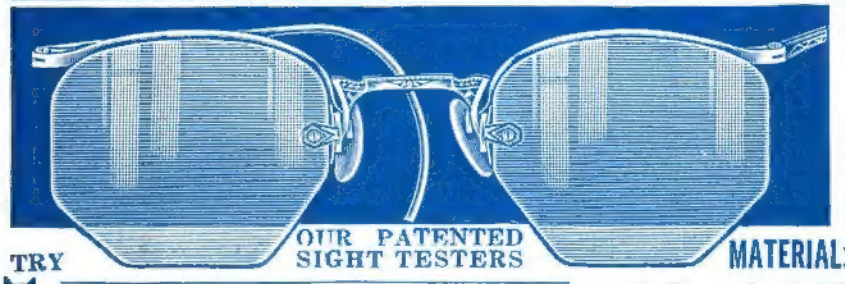

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